

goodbye california: i never thought i wouldn't see you again.

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These images were all photographed in 1994. I was in the Bay Area at the same time as the World Cup but I was not there for that reason. I never knew I would not see California again and therefore I offer myself this photo story and essay as consolation.

My first visit to California was sometime between 1980 or 1981. It was winter, or at least, to my recollection, it was cold. We had gone on a trip to visit Tio José and his family. At that time, he had not moved to the house in Russel Lane - that for a long time felt like my second home. During that trip I also met Tia Lia, his wife - one of the most incredible people I have ever met - and my cousins Andreia and Patricia. Michael and Joseph had not been born yet. I met Tia Fatima and Tio Miranda, the parents of Tio José. Tia Fatima was my grandmother's sister. Finally, I also met Tia Maria, that despite not being a blood relative, was as much part of the family. All of them, even with time driving us apart, are very dear to me.

I remember entering the Miranda's home and going up a flight of stairs into what must have been the living room or a sitting area. There was a Christmas tree and Patricia handed me a gift. It was a big lever operated dump truck. I still have this truck. I still cherish it.

Other than this, there is very little I can recall from that trip. I assume it was a family trip that included my sisters, my aunt Aicha and her children, but I don't have any memories of them being there at all. I guess whatever was happening was so grand that I must have blocked most of what was happening around me and only kept, at least in manifest, the

most important events taking place at the moment: My new family members.

After this first trip, our visits to California became frequent and lengthy. I grew closer to my cousins. We would play together, we would eat together, we would go to summer school together, we would get in trouble together. With them, and Tia Fatima guiding us, we would walk up Saratoga-Sunnyvale Ave., all the way to Safeway, just to buy one or two items that were mostly superfluous, but gave us the opportunity for a walk. On the way, Tia Fatima would stop by a Lemmon tree and tell each of us to hold a lemon firmly in our hands and repeat "Querer é poder". She was a very religious woman. Her faith was only matched by her superstition.

Tio José had a very peculiar character. From very early on, he studied to be a concert pianist but when he made it to university, he became a social activist along with Tia Lia, who he had met in college. Together they engaged in activities against the military dictatorship that had been installed in Brazil. Circumstances made them leave, to Chile first and then to Canada, where he finished his studies as a medical doctor. Fleeing from the cold Canadian weather, they move to Santa Clara Valley, which later would become the Silicon Valley. Tio José loved music. Classical music. In his den, about 12 meters wide, one wall had shelves from wall to wall, floor to ceiling with LP's, cassettes and later CD's. Every opera, every symphony, every recording of the same opera or symphony by the different companies, orchestras, conductors...

My mother and Tia Lia would take us on day trips to all the different parks, aquariums, theme parks, and one day, even to the beach in Santa Cruz. The water

was freezing cold. The sand piping hot. I did not really enjoy that day much. I much preferred our trips to Monterrey Bay Aquarium or to spend the day out for a picnic at "Parque de Avião", as my cousins, not so fluent in Portuguese, would say. I cherish the memories of us playing around the frog fountain in Stanford Mall.

One day, my cousins and I were surprised with a trip to a magical place that we had only heard of; Disneyland. It was a short weekend trip. Two things marked me from that trip. The first being Patricia, my youngest cousin violently throwing up all over the airplane and second, and life changing for me, a Kodak Disc camera.

That was my very first camera. It was fully automatic and produced negatives that were about 1 x 1.5 cm. Anything photographed in noon sun would be overexposed and everything photographed in subdued light would not render any density of information on the negative. Kodak Disc = Entropy.

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Arriving to California, coming from post military dictatorship Brazil was like traveling in time. Sometime in the 70's, the term Silicon Valley was coined and the Bay Area grew around that. I remember landing in LAX in 1984 and having this feeling that can only be described as being on the Clavius Base from Kubrick's 2001: Space Odyssey. A short flight to San Jose and Tio José, Tia Lia, Andreia and Patricia would be at the airport waiting for us. As usual, we would stay at their house, now at 20564 Russel Lane. This time, I met my third cousin. Michael was born.

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If I was not at the dentist, Dr. Fischer, to whom I owe my smile, or at summer school, I would be having the time of my life with my cousins. Michael would be in his "pen" being overlooked by Tia Fatima, Tia Maria and Tio Miranda. Andreia, Patricia and myself would spend the day running around the house and at nightfall, have a toast with butter and a mug of Nesquick watching some cartoons before going to bed. The last event of every night was to see the small plane that would fly over about 11pm dusting insecticides (at least that is what Tia Fatima would tell us, maybe in an effort to keep us in the house).

The house had a very well kept lawn, thanks to the care of Tio Miranda who would keep a tight control over the sprinklers. Alongside the lawn, there was a walkway that took you all the way to the gate. Outside, next to the driveway grew an olive tree that had all of the branches trained into balls.

I was either too young or to busy being a kid to properly explore the full (in)capacity of my Kodak Disc camera. Film and processing at the time was also very costly. Non-the-less I was able to capture many moments of our childhood and family life with that camera. To me, at the time, that is what photography was for; to be able to take back home "that has been" moments from my time in California.

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One of the strongest memories I have of San Francisco is the underground parking lot beneath Union Square. More specifically, the three vending machines that sat side by side next to the cashiers booth. One sold chips, chocolates and candies, one sold cold soft drinks and one sold hot drinks that were prepared "a la minute". Mobile phones had not been invented yet so the only way to regroup was to set a specific time that everyone had to meet and the meeting point was always the vending machines.

San Francisco was an elegant and very well kept lady. At every other corner of Union square or the adjacent streets were huge flower stands where gentlemen would buy a corsage for their lady. The flower stands overflowing with flowers all the way to mid sidewalk offering the passerby an amazing technicolor sight.

Hot dog and pretzel carts were also in every other corner. The best hotdog coming from the cart at the corner of Stockton St. and Powel St.; on a corner of Union Square. Two blocks up the square, in the same building of the Curran theater, stood the shoeshine stand of Joe Azzolini. A few blocks up stands the portal of China Town. Down towards the bay, Fishermans Wharf.

The constant humming of the cable, buried under the rails of the cable car, and out of sight, only added charm to this magnificent place. Buildings, historic and new, stood side by side. Walking down the streets of San Francisco had only one purpose, and the purpose was itself: walking the streets of

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San Francisco. Every now and then I would come across one of these big "electronics" shops with a big entrance with huge displays on both sides showing off everything from Walkmans (cassette), walkie-talkies, stereos, telescopes, binoculars of all sizes and CAMERAS! The only thing not in display was the reputation of the merchants themselves, mostly very shady.

Seeing those SLR's (even if not knowing what an SLR was at the time), and their powerful lenses, gave me this feeling that my entropic Kodak Disc camera was pulling me down and not letting me achieve to my fullest in photography.

Our day trips took us to destinations other than San Francisco. Carmel, Moss Landing, Sausalito, Monterrey, Oakland, Palo Alto... But San Francisco was always the preferred destination and each one in our group had their own reasons. Mine was the uncountable number of curious faces that you would come across while strolling.

Still young and very introvert, I had trouble talking to people. It was very hard for me to approach a stranger, strike conversation and then take a photograph. At the time, I used an adapted version of "shoot first, ask later". I would shot first, from a distance, and later try to grow the balls to strike up conversation. The truth is that conversation only happened when it was started by the other party. Nowadays, I can hardly keep my mouth shut, conversing even with the inanimate.

How I've changed. Now-a-days, taking a photograph of a person I do not have an opportunity to talk to is completely worthless to me.

I wish I had that spirit back then. I wish I had talked to more people while still in California. I wish I had brought a coffee to the veteran that was always at the entrance of the Union Square underground parking and struck some conversation with him. I wish I had taken a portrait of Harold, a crossdresser salesman - an elegant lady that was only betrayed by a less than clean shave - at one of the department stores. I wish I had talked to the saxophone player that was playing on the corner opposite of the entrance to Chinatown, and that was pissed off because I took his photo without asking first. I wish I was wearing leather shoes to have a

reason to talk to Joe Azzolini while he shined my shoes. It was not until 1994 when we only exchanged a few words for he asked for 1\$ to allow me to take his photo. I still remember him justifying, in his heavy Italian accent, that he was famous, while pointing to the different magazine ads, featuring him, that hung inside his shine stand. Come to think of it, it was the only time in my life that I actually paid to take a photograph of someone.

I wish I had made better use of my time in California. Even if I was only a kid back then.

In the late 80's, sometime around 1988, with my Kodak Disc being completely outdated, my photography gear was upgraded to a Minolta 110 Weathermatic. That camera must have been designed by someone who really intended to frustrate people who were trying to take a picture.

It was a weatherproof and underwater (therefore lime yellow) TLR camera that had a good 10cm distance between the viewing lens and the taking lens. I discover parallax. At that time, I was not so into photographing people or landscapes. I was not into photographing anything really. The camera, to me, was means of cataloguing and collecting data. I would use the camera to photograph the most curious items that caught my attention. From old paperweights to obsolete technology in the form of a mimeograph, old phones, plants, shoes, photographs themselves, documents, tools.... I guess I was trying to create for myself a "General Catalogue of Items", a lexicon, of sorts, a file cabinet filled with photographs of things.

However, most of the photographs were off. Firstly, the camera had a minimum focal distance that did not allow me to get as close to the objects as I desired. The photos were all out of focus. Secondly, what pissed me off the most, was the absurd parallax when photographing close-up.

This camera frustrated me even more than the old Kodak Disc. Needless to say, it did not accompany me in the many trips I made to California.

I remember, still with amazement, visiting Cannery Row and the Monterrey Bay Aquarium. We also visited nearby Carmel-By-The-Sea, maybe too clean or too hermetic for my taste. But there was this small place called Moss Landing on the way to Monterrey that always caught my attention. There was something mystical, unexplainable, about this place.

On the way south, on Cabrillo Highway, right before reaching Moss Landing you would already see the artichoke plantations all the way to the horizon. As you reached Moss Landing, you were received by the two sky high chimneys of the Moss Landing Power Plan.

It is a very small city - I don't even think you can call it a city, it must have had a population of a hundred at most - and every house seemed to have a small shed where antiques were sold. It is interesting to see what Americans consider antiques. Most of what was sold was vintage at most, the oldest maybe being glassware from the "depressed era".

Everything about this place was peculiar. The name itself, to me, offered great interest - moss is my favorite from the flora - and the minute size of this one street city that was studded with sheds offering old paraphernalia.

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Many times, no matter how far our trips took us, we would come back to have dinner at Los Gatos Inn. There, as everywhere in the area, a soft drink came in a tall glass with ice, a straw and a maraschino cherry. On they way to the bathroom, a cigarette vending machine offered all of the different brands and a big sign banned minors from making a purchase.

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Our California trips had two modalities. If it was a family trip, we would stay at Oakwood Apartments, where we would rent a furnished apartment for the length of our stay. If I was going alone with my mother, we would stay at Tio José's house. These trips had a very definite purpose. Taking care of my teeth, or taking care of any other medical issue. With Tio José trusted MD for any malady. The long haul from São Paulo to San Jose was "easy", for, as of 1986, my father was running a travel agency and he got all the perks that came with it.

Most of the time we flew Varig for the long international flights and PSA - I still remember the smile on the planes nose - for the short commuter flights around the bay area.

I had a major shift in my life in 1989. December 1989. Back in Brazil, my mother had been diagnosed with breast cancer. I was 13 years old at the time. Again, Tio José was at the airport and from there to get her checked and the biopsy was done under his supervision. The whole family flew over to California and for a change we were staying at Park Central Apartments, in Benton St. - Santa Clara. However, we spent both Christmas Eve and New Years eve at Tio José's house.

It was fun, I am not going to say otherwise. But the reason we were there was not the best. Moreover, there was a main character missing in our celebration. Tia Lia had passed only a couple of months earlier. Between Tia Lia being in heaven and my mom facing her current predicament, the Christmas turkey felt a little too dry.

Soon after the holidays, most of the family left to Brazil but Tia Aicha and I, who stayed behind to take care of my mom.

And just like that, the life of this 13-year-old turned upside down. I tried my best not to let my mom feel how much I was feeling it, after all, she was the one that was sick and going through treatment. I also did my best to be supportive to Tia Aicha because she was seeing her sister go through all the physical stress of chemo and radiotherapy. At the same time, I did my best to be good company for Andrea, Patricia, Michael and little Joe, who just recently had lost their mother. On top of all that, I was going to a new school.

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Foothill middle school was big. Almost as big as my school back in São Paulo. The only difference was that my peers were not the warm hearted Latin American friends I had back home. It was very hard to make friends. Actually, I made none. My acquaintances, throughout my stay in California were Ali, an oncologist who owned a stationery store near our house, Mr. Inderbitzen, our classroom teacher, the lady from the flower shop near our house, that always gave me a good deal on balloons and flowers - for she knew that they were from my

mom - and the guy from the photo lab. I only came to meet him after my 14th birthday.

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Early February my mother asked me what I wanted for my birthday. Previously she had always heard somewhat bizarre requests, like a printing press, when I was 7 and a Black & Decker hand drill when I was 9. It was always something to do with making. Tools were my favorite.

This year, I asked her for an SLR. No particular brand. I just wanted a camera that would not limit me like my previous two. I promised her that if she would give me an SLR, I would one day make her proud.

With a budget of 200\$ I went to San Jose Camera & Video and for that money, for \$199 to be exact, I was offered a Minolta X-700 with a 50mm/2.8 lens.

For the full 7 months that we stayed in California, and not having any friends, I dedicated the entirety of my time to studying and taking care of my mom. If was not busy with that, I would be photographing or memorizing the lyrics to Les Misérables (which I still have committed to memory till this day).

At the time I was only shooting color negative films. I would buy the films at the mini-lab and I would get them developed at the mini-lab. This place was just around the corner from our house in Santa Clara and it was well within my reach. All of my allowance was spend either in films, processing or balloons and flowers for mom. Every week I would bring her a flower or a balloon. Every week I would shoot and develop a roll of film.

What I photographed during that period was not something to call home about. With no access to anything other than intuition, I was teaching myself exposure and composition. I had not been exposed to any of the great works in photography. I knew no great names to inspire me. I only had my will to learn and to experiment. I was mostly photographing our day-to-day lives and I also took my camera to all of our day trips. I also did plenty of experimenting. I remember cutting out elements from a photograph, gluing them to another photograph and then rephotographing it in an attempt to successfully create a photomontage. I did experiment a lot. I took my Minolta X-700 to the limit. That camera changed my life.

Most of what I photographed during my 7 month stay in Santa Clara was lost to time. I do have a couple of shots, some of my photomontage experiments and a small album filled with photos from that time.

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I used to buy filters, the most kitsch, from a photography store in Valco Shopping mall. I am sure there were better places, with a better selection, but what I found in this shop was plenty for me. Starburst, rainbow stars, keyhole, blue transition, sepia transition, prisms; you want kitsch, you got it. One day, maybe a month before our journey back to Brazil, as I was visiting this shop, I spotted something that forever change my life. Again.

Up on the top of a shelf, displayed in an open box, was a complete kit for a darkroom. At the time I was not pretty sure what all that was or what it did. All I knew, and again, from intuition, was that that equipment was used to print photographs from my negatives.

With the sad puppy eyes and all the tenderness in the world, I was able to convince my mom to get it for me. When I got the ok, I remember going to the shop with Andreia so she could help me carry it. As we carried that oversized box across the mall, all the way to the car, I was crying "Haleluia!" and Andreia would reply with "Praise the Lord!".

It was a Meopta enlarger that came with everything you could possible need to develop black and white film and make enlargements. It even came with chemistry. I never touched it until we were back in Brazil.

It did not contain a proper instruction manual. You had to wing it most of the way if you were not already acquainted with the darkroom processes. It was a different time. Internet had not been invented. If you felt horny, well guess what, you better save a couple of bucks and make friends with the magazine stand guy so that he will sell you those magazines reserved for above 18.

After reading all the material included in the kit, and the processing instructions on every bottle of chemistry, I set out to develop my first roll of black and white film (curiously enough, I still have the negatives). All was set. I had the tank, the reel, the

cover, the roll of film, all in front of me. Red lights on, lights off. I spooled my film onto the reel and locked it in the tank. Lights back on, red lights off. As I poured developer from the bottle into the tank, in my mind, I said a small prayer for the silver halide gods. I followed every step described in developing instructions. All was going fine. Was I doing everything right? Did I miss a step? No, I knew what I was doing. Last few seconds of washing. Water was dumped and the tank was opened.

The film was an almost black strip of acetate. Against direct sun you could faintly see a silhouette of something. That looked nothing like the negatives I was used to. I had definitely done something wrong.

Film was expensive, I could not go through another roll of film without knowing for sure what had gone wrong. I re-read everything. I re-read it again. I could not find at all what had gone wrong.

Back in school, there was a couple of elective courses for high schoolers only. Basic photography, Photojournalism and Yearbook. I had seen the photography teacher around the school. I knew what he looked like. I could simply approach him and ask for some advice.

I meet William Elmore Gann. Very generous man and the best story teller I have ever met. He asked me to describe every process in order to determine what went wrong. "Film is sensitive to red light. By exposing the film to this red light, you completely burned your film." Ok, that made sense. "You can't pour chemistry straight from the bottle. Every chemical in processing has a particular dilution as a working solution. Check the labels on the bottle and there should be a recommendation of how much to dilute it." How the hell did I miss that? They were about to start a darkroom session and Gann invited me to watch a demonstration of how a print was made. I stood in awe.

I shot another roll of black and white film. Back in the lab. Chemistry properly diluted. Lights out. Red lights out. Film is loaded. Lights back on. Developer goes in. Time does not pass. Stop bath. That is a quick one, only 30 seconds. Fixer. Wash, wash, wash. I open the tank and pull out the

negatives. Perfectly developed. I did it! What a rush!!!

I finally made it to high school. By then I had already developed many films. I knew darkroom techniques. However, I signed up for my first elective with Gann. I was in ninth grade taking Basic Photography. Gann did cut me some slack. He knew what I knew and he allowed me plenty of latitude when it came to the syllabus.

Gann was also from California; from Orange County. He described his story as being identical to the film American Graffiti. Gann had photographer Black Elk, grandson (if I am not mistaken) of Sitting Bull. He had photographed all over the death valley aboard his yellow volkswagen bus. He photographed Vietnam and most of the south Pacific while deployed during the war.

Gann taught me very important lessons about color and about tonal value. He is a master of the zone system. He learned it from Ansel Adams himself.

We would often roam São Paulo photographing together. That is when I started Anonymous Faces project, back in 1994, photographing with my Minolta and now, also with a 1976 Hasselblad.

Quite a few times I had photographed California using my Minolta. But never in medium format.

It was through this Hasselblad, in 1994, that I saw California for the last time. It was the middle of the world cup. Americans were trying hard to show some interest for soccer.

I only had a few weeks to spend photographing the places I loved...and still love. By that time, I was shooting mostly black and white and reversal.

San Francisco looks beautiful on the Ektachrome emulsion. The places I loved looked great on this film. With no regards to composition, with a complete freedom to the rules, I shot this city I love so much.

Ektachrome, like any reversal film, is very, sensitive to incorrect light-metering. I remember studying

each shot carefully not to mess up my shot. My people skills were somewhat better and I did manage to capture three portraits that I am truly proud of (yes, only three – I said somewhat better). That one shot of Joe and the steamer at Fisherman's Wharf are among my favorite shots.

A street singer was finishing a tune right on Union Square when I lifted my camera. She held the pose, after having finished the tune in order to give me a chance to take my shot. When I lowered my camera, she said "Keep the picture kid, someday it will be worth millions." I am now 45. I was 18. What has become of this lady?

During this trip, I also had a chance to visit Yosemite. That was a first for me - and in the mind of an 18-year-old - I was following the footsteps of the great master Ansel Adams.

FUCK! If only I had a 50mm Distagon for my Hassel! It's just that the sequoias are very, very, very tall! So is the Half Dome! So is El Capitan! In moments like these, you do the best you can, you improvise, you dance according to the music. The music I was listening to was an 80mm lens. I did the best I could.

Looking back at the photos, so many years later, I can't understand my disappointment. I was 18, with the less than appropriate gear and with a very narrow time limit. Furthermore, all of the great "postcard" shots have already been taken? What was I expecting?

Looking at the photos today, I can see the thought process. I can see the tall landscapes caught in two photograms. I can see the texture of the different leaves and the contrast between the sky and the greens you only see at Yosemite. Today, I am no longer disappointed.

The slides from this trip have already developed this pinkish-bluish hue that old photos seem to develop, even if only in my eyes.

I did not know I would not see California again. Well, in fact, I did. I went back in December '99, without a camera, and only brought back memories that I wish to forget.