



Through My LENS

story by **Soliel Lara Aponte**
photos by **Betsy Burrow & Griffin Pilcher**
design by **Betsy Burrow**

A simple press of a button can freeze a sentimental moment forever.

For senior Billy Zhao, a screenshot from a video call holds a special place in his heart.

“[It’s a picture] of me and my nanny, who raised me since I was brought into this world,” Zhao said. “I don’t call her enough ever since I moved to Canada. I went from seeing her every day to now through a phone screen.”

Occasionally, Zhao finds himself going over photographs, looking for the comfortable feeling of nostalgia. Just like that snapshot of time,

they remind him of the importance of maintaining connections. Other students at Pepperdine feel the same way.

“When revisiting pictures, I always get this overwhelming feeling of fullness in life and embrace it,” Zhao said.

Waves of Nostalgia

Students said they feel nostalgia when looking at old photographs. It allows them to reflect on the experiences they have already lived and try to reconnect with those moments again.

“When I’m going through an old photo album and come across childhood photos, feelings surface more than the memories themselves,” senior Lynn Kim said.

Zhao described nostalgia as one of the best feelings in the world.

“Regardless of whether it’s sadness or happiness, looking through photos makes me feel like I’ve lived a life,” Zhao said. “It reminds me of the things I’ve done that have made me the person I am today.”

For sophomore Riley Smith, one worn image carries the weight of sisterhood and the warmth of years gone by.

“There’s this picture of me and my sisters that my mom took eating bagels at the beach,” Smith said. “It reminds me of how much I love my family and love watching my sisters grow as the oldest.”

Being the oldest sister of four at the time, Smith said the photo’s warmth makes her acknowledge how much she loves her family.

“I loved growing up with them — it’s such a joy to see them grow and take after me,” Smith said.

Kim said her dad is the reason she started taking pictures, and now, looking back, it makes her relive all the good memories they formed together.

“Growing up, my dad always took a camera with him for our family trips,” Kim said. “I would always take his camera and pretend to be him — now looking back at those photos reminds me how happy I was.”

Freezing the Moment

Capturing the perfect picture can come at the expense of missing the moment. Zhao tries to balance appreciating the “now” with

preserving it for later admiration.

“Taking pictures has recently slowed down,” Zhao said. “I’m trying to be more present in the moment.”

Smith acknowledged the fleeting, priceless moments that can pass by when one focuses on taking photos instead of letting them happen organically.

“When I’m with my friends, I want to bring out my camera when it feels more authentic to be able to capture something more genuine and timeless,” Smith said.

Taking pictures helps remind Zhao of what once was and frames moments that outlast time. He said he often loses himself in a sense of nostalgia.

“Some photos remind me of the state of mind I was in when taking them,” Zhao said. “More significant photos can transport me back to the smell, the taste — all the senses I was experiencing at the time.”

In a world where technology is everything, students said they take pictures daily for autobiographical remembrance.

“I take pictures pretty often,” Zhao said. “My camera roll has around 67,000 photos of my daily life.”

Austrian Researchers Kurt Kotrschal and Leopold Kisinger studied photography in their dissertation, “Hunters and Gatherers of Pictures: Why Photography Has Become a Human Universal.” They argued that the human urge to take, view and share pictures comes from natural tendencies influenced by evolution and technology.

“Photography is part of my self-expression,” Kim said. “It allows me to express how I see the beauty in the moments I’m living in.”

Snapshots and Photo Curation

Students document their experiences and deepen their involvement with their community by creating digital diaries using social media and photography.

In one of their last nights as first-years, Smith described how she and her friend, sophomore Keira Kim, created an Instagram account called “memsandmemos” to document their college life and share it with their friends who were leaving to study abroad.

“We wanted to find another way to keep in touch with our friends besides texting,” Smith said. “The account feels like an online scrapbook, perfectly curated so our

friends don’t feel like they’re missing out in Malibu.”

Smith hopes that when she and her friends see each other again, it will feel as though no time has passed — as if they’d witnessed each other’s growth in person rather than filtered through a screen.

“Although all of our friends are on different continents, I want the account to feel as if we are living together but through an online format,” Smith said.

Kim said she created a photography account called “lynns35mm” where she posts pictures taken from her Kodak M35 camera.

“I wanted a creative outlet to showcase my photos,” Kim said. “Somewhere I could keep track of all my memories and serve as a digital diary.”

Students use social media as a creative way to frame moments that will outlast time. Zhao said photographs help him remember those intricate details that he might have forgotten had it not been for a picture.

“Some memories fade without photographs,” Zhao said. “It’s like every time I look at one, it stirs my untapped subconscious and I instantly remember.”

