

All-County Academic Teams: 20 Years

Alfred the Gnome was Anna's traveling companion during the last six years.

1999 Camden High School grad captures the world in pictures

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On March 25, Anna Mazurek was in northern Chile. WiFi service was “pretty sporadic” in places and didn’t work at all for two days as the month drew to a close and Anna didn’t expect it to for a few more days.

Anna, a 1999 Camden High School (CHS) graduate named to that year’s Upchurch & Jowers All-County Academic Team, was on one of many assignments she undertakes as a professional photographer. She works for Apple when she’s back in the United States, and a number of magazines, includ-

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Surrounded by Tibetan prayer flags, 1999 Camden High School graduate and All-County Academic Team member, Anna Mazurek, gets ready to shoot photographs atop Khardung La, the highest motorable pass in the world at more than 18,000 feet in the Himalayas in India.



Photos courtesy of Anna Mazurek

Mazurek

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ing Southern Living, across the country and around the world.

Her trek through Chile was part of a “seven-month bucket list trip” through Central and South America. The trip started in October 2014.

“I started in October and head back to the U.S. in June,” Anna said as part of a series of emails. “One of the highlights of the trip was the month I spent in Patagonia. I did some incredible hikes in Torres del Paine, Chile; and El Chalten, Argentina. The fruit in northern Patagonia is the best -- I ate fresh berries every day!”

Anna said she fell in love with photography and traveling when she studied in England during her junior of college at the University of South Carolina (USC).

“Photographs were the best way to share my experiences from my travels with people. At the time, I was studying journalism and started to pursue photography as a career,” she said.

After graduating from USC, she decided to attend graduate school at the University of Missouri, earning a master’s degree in photojournalism. Anna then found work with Southern Living, The Birmingham (Ala.) News and Rolling Stone magazine.

Did a particular teacher inspire her to work in photography? Not necessarily, but one teacher did inspire her to maintain a good attitude in life and work: current CHS Principal Dan Matthews.

“(He) was my favorite teacher in high school,” Anna said. “He was my AP calculus teacher my senior year. I loved his style, laid-back attitude and humor. He was also very passionate and had a great attitude about life,



Alfred the Gnome on the beach in Punta Uva, Costa Rica.

which made the difficult subject easier to manage. He even wrote my college recommendation letters and always had faith in my ability to succeed.”

Taking on Matthews’ attitude may have served her in being named to the 1999 All-County Academic Team. Anna said she was excited and honored to be part of the team.

“It was a reminder that hard work does not go unnoticed. The same work ethic led me to succeed academically in college and professionally,” she said.

Anna found she had a passion not only for taking pictures, but to travel. She said it’s all she’s ever wanted to do.

“And that’s exactly what I do,” explaining she has traveled to 42 countries and lived in five.

Anna said when the recession hit in 2008, it became clear her photo contacts would soon disappear. What did she do? Turned to “globetrotting,” naturally.

“It may seem like a bold move in uncertain times, but I gained one valuable asset: an abun-

dance of time. It was an epic adventure -- eight countries in 13 months. I photographed bands in Australia for Rolling Stone, bungee jumped in New Zealand, and camped with yak-herding nomads in India. The best part is that I did it solo,” Anna said.

Her 2008 adventure started in Australia with a work visa, allowing her to get a job managing photo trips for high school students in India and Southeast Asia.

“I spent about a third of the next five years running trips in Asia, teaching English briefly and traveling,” Anna said. “I discovered that when I started living my daydreams, it redefined what I thought was possible and expanded my comfort zone. Besides, sitting still is boring.”

Her most amazing experience: obtaining a photo pass to one of the Dalai Lama’s teachings at his temple in McLeod Ganj, India.

“It took two days and a visit to the Tibetan government office to get the pass. I was extremely

lucky. It was the most amazing experience of my life,” she exclaimed.

While she does travel alone, Anna actually has a companion on her adventures: Alfred the Gnome. She posts photographs and writes about Alfred on her website/blog, TravelLikeAnna.com, including a “biography.”

“Alfred’s probably the only gnome that’s been kicked out of the Taj Mahal. I met Alfred in Australia. It was love at first sight in the garden aisle. For the past six years, we’ve been travel buddies and trekked across five continents together. Alfred loves to be photographed. His goal is to make people laugh and inspire them to travel. I started making silly gnome cards for friends, but started selling them on Etsy and art shows because people loved them so much. Everyone needs a gnome in their mailbox!”

Pictures of Alfred include ones in Australia, India, Thailand, Japan, Costa Rica, Cambodia,



Anna took this photo of Fushimi Inari Shrine outside Kyoto, Japan, in January 2014. “I got up at 4:30 a.m. and endured 30+ mosquito bites to beat the crowds,” she wrote of the photo on her blog. “I didn’t see another foreigner for hours. This was by far one of my favorite moments and photos in Japan.”

Malaysia, England, Laos, and various points in the U.S., such as Charleston, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, Las Vegas and Yosemite National Park in California.

Anna (and Alfred) often keep in touch with her parents, Boykin Furniture owner Joe and Lucy Mazurek. And, yes, there’s a photographic -- or, perhaps, videographic would be more accurate -- family connection. On her professional photography website, AnnMazurekPhoto.com, Anna has devoted space to a video she made of her father’s group of coffee- and pastry-loving, woodworking friends, the Ugly Men’s Club.

The 2013 video explains the history of the store, Joe Mazurek’s focus on 18th century furniture and his work and then moves on to the club and its members: Col. Bob McKenzie, a Vietnam veteran from Michigan; Huey Brown, who’s

worked on upholstery with his wife for about 50 years; Andy van Dam, a retired Camden art and antique dealer originally from The Netherlands; Michael Hartis, who’s worked in the shop for eight years; and Joseph Mazurek, the youngest member at 11 (at the time of the video), Joe Mazurek’s grandson. The late David Howard, a University of Kentucky chemical engineering graduate, was also a member featured in the video, which is dedicated to his memory.

On April 5, Anna was in Bolivia, where she said the WiFi was “fairly decent.” She’s continuing that South American “bucket list” trip, Alfred in tow. Anna said she hopes to be home -- currently Austin, Texas -- by June, but don’t be surprised if she heads off again for parts known and unknown as she continues to capture the world through her camera lens.