Local resident left scientist career to become photographer

Unique National Park project completed

By Donna H Ellisson
Staff Writer

Why did an Evergreen resident, with a PhD in computer science, born and raised in Paris, become passionate about mountaineering, photography and American national parks? All this, plus the fact that 44-year old Quang Tuan Luong recently completed a 15-year extensive detailed photographic series of all our 58 national parks, called The National Park Project.

As a child, Quang Tuan Luong’s experiences with nature outside the city consisted of skiing in the Alps and beach trips with his Vietnamese family. His priorities changed when he joined the mountaineering club in college. During the week he studied in the city, but spent weekends climbing in the pristine Alps. Because of his passion for the wilderness, it took five years to complete his PhD studies at the University of Paris.

In early 1993, he visited the United States because of curiosity, and the desire to visit places like Yosemite. “One of the few places I kept hearing about from other climbers was Yosemite,” he says. “I decided to climb on Yosemite.”

Luong took a post-doctorate position at Cal Berkeley, the closest major research university to Yosemite National Park. During the week he researched artificial intelligence, and wrote articles and a book. He spent weekends in Yosemite. Then, photography meant recording places he climbed and enjoyed.

In the spring of 1993 he climbed alone to the top of Denali (Mt. McKinley), the tallest mountain in North America, and later that year visited the Utah parks and Death Valley. He’d never seen a desert before, as they’re nonexistent in Europe. There he decided to use a 5x7” large format camera which gave him additional creative opportunities. Now he saw prominent details in the photographs that

An image captured by Luong at Redwood National Park

...showed his new perspective.

In order to clearly see Glacier Bay in Alaska, Luong took a kayaking class in Santa Cruz in preparation for his first kayaking trip. Then he spent two weeks with a friend paddling through icebergs to clean the beauty of the park.

He and his wife, Luach, took a floatplane with an inflatable canoe to an Alaskan Eskimo village. This was the starting point for their trip down the wild Kobuk River.

Meet Mike McGeough, an Ultra-Distance Cyclist

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A California coastal scene by Luong.

It’s a bird! It’s a plane! It’s a hawk attacking students!

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‘Movies Under The Stars’ to be held at Evergreen Village; ‘Nim’s Island’ to be shown

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A Luong photograph from Grand Canyon National Park.

Photographer

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He never saw at the actual site. His photography reached a new level.

Luong was fascinated with the beauty and contrasts of the national parks. He says, “I thrive on looking for new experiences. After spending so much time in the glacial atmospheres of steep high mountain faces, I was drawn to the natural diversity offered by the national parks, as I noticed that each environment gave rise to distinct new emotions.” He wanted to “document the parks in a way that would do justice to their splendor.”

For the last 15 years Quang photographed the parks from various perspectives to document the beauty, diversity and distinguishing features. “I enjoyed the challenges of planning and traveling to a number of remote locations, each with their own logistical problems. There was also the intellectual curiosity of finding out what makes each place special and unique in the larger picture of things.”

His research training enabled him to include all unique physical highlights and their seasonal changes. He says, “I like to emphasize the beauty, as I feel that aesthetic appreciation will lift our soul and eventually lead to awareness and respect for the natural and cultural diversity of our planet.”

Photographs weren’t only taken from the roadside, but throughout the parks, including the wilderness. He traveled by car, plane, floatplane, ferry, motorboat, canoe, kayak and by foot. He also snorkeled and did scuba diving.

Luong’s photographs have been displayed in Terra Galleria Artworks in Santa Monica for two months. His photographs can be seen on his website: www.terragalleria.com/parks. In a few years he’ll publish a book with about 500 of his photographs.

What’s next? He’s considering combining culture with physical beauty by photographing international UNESCO world culture sites. “This can lead to an awareness and respect for the natural and cultural diversity of our planet.”