

Bocchine sees the world through her camera's lens

by Nathan St. Clair
Concordian staff

Much like the pinhole cameras she uses to capture unique perspectives of ordinary scenes, Sheila Bocchine sees the peculiarity in the commonplace, every-day experiences of her own life.

Bocchine, the daughter of James and Paola Bocchine of Concordia, does not let much stop her from soaking up the joy and adventure life can offer. She has spent the years since she graduated from Concordia High School in 1998, exploring, opening new doors in photography, completing a master's degree and living and working in South Korea for two years — her most recent adventure.

From very beginning, after graduating, Bocchine left small-town life and headed to Chicago where she attended Columbia College Chicago. Focusing on her creativity, she majored in journalism and photography. Although she never pursued a journalism career, she did follow her passion for photography. After college, she acquired a graduate degree in arts and cultural management from Pratt Institute in New York City, which helped launch her into a career of photography.

Like many photographers, for years she used the standard equipment like a 35-millimeter camera. But upon stumbling upon an antiquish-looking pinhole camera in a shop one day, she began to rethink how to practice photography. It was not until months later that she bought her first pinhole camera that opened up a whole new world of photography.

Pinhole cameras consist of a small box with no cracks or seams that allow light into it. The only source of light is a small pin-size hole in the front. On the back is a strip of film that captures an image when the pinhole is uncovered to allow light into the box. Bocchine said pinhole cameras can make the most ordinary shots into novel pieces of art.

Since she started using the camera several years ago, she hasn't stopped. The only two types of cameras she uses are the pinhole and her iPhone.

After finishing her graduate degree, Bocchine moved to Arizona where she lived until May 2009 when she took a huge step out of her comfort zone and moved to South Korea to teach English.

Bocchine was looking for a new adventure and wanted to travel. She searched online and spoke to recruiters from various programs about available positions overseas. She waited until she was offered a position at a school that met her qualifications.

She was hired by a small, private school in Suwon, South Korea, a city of one million south of Seoul. She said the city is very modern and has everything most western people would expect to find in a large city. She lived in an apartment provided by the school near the city's downtown area.

She taught three different grade levels — kindergarten, elementary and middle school. In her classroom, Bocchine immersed the students in learning English. In fact, according to school rules, the students were not allowed to use Korean in the classroom. The goal of the program was to make students fluent in English by the time they were 13 years old.

She said the way she instructed her students changed with the different age groups, but she always tried to make it interesting. She used illustrations or acted out words and phrases the children did not understand. She also used books and created lesson plans.

Of the different age groups, she had the most fun working with the kindergarten and elementary students. She said the children were always very friendly and interested in the content she taught.

"When they learned a new word or sentence, they would get so excited," she said.

They even helped her learn Korean when they were not practicing English.

She worked year round with two weeks of paid vacation. She said Korean students get very little time off. Even

during the summers, they have to take extra English classes in order to hone their skills. Bocchine said they also work very hard and do a lot of homework. It is not uncommon for Korean students to stay up until midnight or 1 a.m. finishing homework. Good grades make it easier for them to get accepted into college and study overseas in places like Canada.

With an ever-growing global economy, many Koreans see knowing English and having a western education as essential to getting good jobs.

From the moment she stepped foot in the country, she started seeking out the adventures to be had.

"I am pretty fearless when it comes to traveling," she said.

She said by having a good attitude and open mind, she was able to enjoy the full cultural immersion and avoid culture shock, which many foreigners experience in their first few days or weeks in a new country.

"I love trying new things," she said. "I tried everything."

Every free day or weekend, she spent traveling around parts of the country. She traveled and hung out with a small group of other expatriates living abroad as well as several Koreans who met along the way. They went to festivals, visited Buddhist temples, saw mountains, hung out at one of several clubs for foreigners and sang a lot of karaoke.

"That was so much fun," she said. "I loved singing karaoke."

South Koreans gather in private karaoke rooms called norebangs and sing and party throughout the night.

"They're as crazy as you can get," Bocchine said.

She also enjoyed trying new foods. She said at first, she did not like her food options. Overtime, however, her palette

became accustomed to the new spices, meats and side dishes. While some might squirm at the thought of eating octopus, Bocchine loved it.

"It's so good," she said.

Throughout her two-year journey, she carried her pinhole camera, which she used to capture the vibrant colors and unique architecture throughout the Asian country. She said it was hard to get film developed because it is a very rare kind of photographing technique, but she couldn't miss the opportunities for new scenery.

In May, she returned to the United States and even though she has only been gone from South Korea for a few months, she already misses it — especially the food.

She won't have much time to think about things she misses because in August she will leave the United States again and go to China. She has been hired by a private school in Shenzhen, China, which is slightly north of Hong Kong in southeastern China. She will teach English, but this time it will only be to young elementary students. She said she will have a little more paid vacation and climate will be much more tropical than South Korea. She is excited about the possibilities and the chance to experience a new culture and learn a different language.

She said it has been nice to come home for a while and see family and friends. Her heart might be in another country, but her roots are right here in the Midwest and she enjoys having home-cooked meals — usually Italian, as her mother's family is from Italy, — visiting small towns and shopping.

She encourages others to experience other cultures. She said traveling abroad is relatively "easy" and is safe.

"I highly recommend it," she said.



Photo furnished
Sheila Bocchine has let her curiosity be her guide, and it has already taken her to some exotic locations. Here she is trying on a hanbok, traditional Korean clothing.



Sheila Bocchine

Above: Bocchine had to get creative to get this picture at Gyeongbok Palace. "I sneaked behind a building and found perfectly silhouetted against a moody sky gargoyle-like decorations, which adorn many of the palace rooftops," she said.

Below: Koreans celebrate Buddha's birthday on May 10, but the celebration goes on for nearly a month with colorful lanterns adorning the streets.



Sheila Bocchine

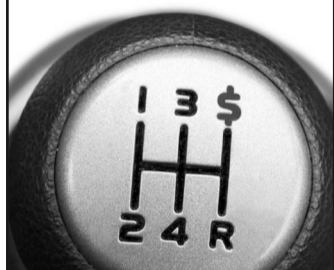
Above: "This gorgeous Buddha was at Seorak Mountain in Korea. So poised and perfect, I immediately became infatuated with the headpiece," Bocchine said.

Below: At the Noryangjin Fish Market, Bocchine was able to get one of her favorite local dishes — fresh octopus. She said crabs and even shark were available.



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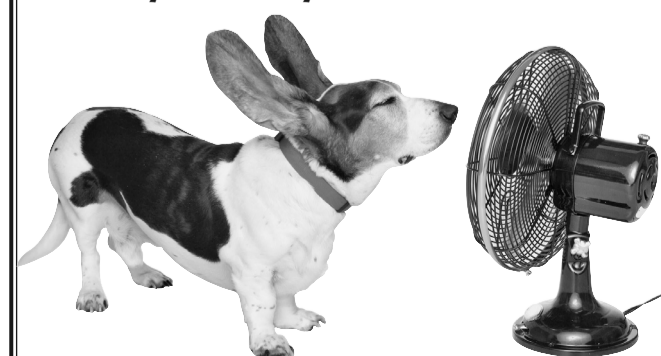
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