Maureen Kelly wins first place, Phil Alexander second in People of the World category

First Place: Maureen Kelly

The day she learned she was a finalist in the Travel Photo Contest was bittersweet for Maureen Kelly. It was also the day her father passed away — the man who pushed her to venture far beyond her Parma home and who encouraged her to take a planned three-week trip to China in January despite his illness.

He also urged her to enter the photo contest but never learned that she won.

Kelly's photo, taken in a classroom outside Xi'an, China, shows unmitigated joy on the faces of a group of third-graders, despite the fact that their school was so cold.

Kelly, 18 and a freshman at Ursuline College, said she's still unsure why they were so happy. She was on a cultural tour of China with a group of American students, and they stopped in at the school unannounced. The children sang a Chinese lullaby to break the ice; then the U.S. students followed with "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star."

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"I think they were just laughing at the fact that they had probably never seen Americans before," said Kelly.

The photograph was a big hit with the judges.

"Every expression is different, but they're all registering joy and life," said Ian Adams. "I don't think there's anything about it I don't like. Everything contributes to the photograph."

Kelly, who is studying visual communications at Ursuline, took the photo with her Nikon D3100. She wins a four-night trip for two to Mexico's Riviera Maya, courtesy of Apple Vacations and Barcelo Maya Beach & Caribe.