

Natural Selections

A NEWSLETTER OF THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY



JULIETTE WIPF | Natural Selections

Dominique Ansel Nominated Best Pastry Chef in the World: A Cronut Comeback?

JULIETTE WIPF

Who hasn't heard of the famed 2013 food the Cronut? After quickly gaining worldwide attention, Cronut followers were soon considered frivolous, and the pastry over-hyped. *TIME* magazine naming the pastry one of the 25 best inventions of the year in 2013, can be a particularly bittersweet pill for us scientists to swallow. However, the fame of this hybrid delicacy is based on the skills of an extraordinary chef, Dominique Ansel, creator of the Cronut, who recently won the title of "Best Pastry Chef in the World," as part of the 2017 World's 50 Best Restaurants Awards. Ansel received his training at *Fauchon* in Paris, a legendary delicatessen company and symbol of French-style luxury. Without having any sort of culinary degree, he started as a seasonal staff member, and ultimately worked himself up to head of *Fauchon's* international expansion. In 2005, he settled down in New York City and worked as the executive pastry chef at Daniel, a renowned French restaurant on

the corner of 65th Street and Park Avenue. Many ascribe a large part of Daniel's success to Ansel, who worked at the restaurant when it first received three Michelin stars. He finally opened his own bakery in Soho in 2011, which gained cult status long before the Cronut® hype. Other popular pastry creations by Ansel are the DKA (Dominique's *Kouign Amann*, a Breton puff pastry), Frozen S'mores (ice cream covered in chocolate *millefeuille* and flamed marshmallow, served on an apple wood-smoked willow branch), the Chocolate Chip Cookie Shot (a shot glass shaped cookie filled with cold-infused vanilla milk, only available after 3 p.m.), the Magic *Soufflé* (notably the only *soufflé* that does not collapse, with Grand Mariner liquor and orange blossom), the Gingerbread Pinecone (a layered pastry finished with 70 individual chocolate petals), and the Christmas Morning Cereal (only available in December). You can also choose from more conservative, but similarly beautifully

presented pastries on display, or a classic chocolate croissant. My favorite is the Pear & Champagne Mousse Cake.

In case you decide to try a real Cronut, let me give you some advice. Everyday, about 350 Cronuts are made. The flavor of the Cronut changes every month, and is never repeated. Dominique Ansel Bakery opens at 8 a.m., and to secure a Cronut you should arrive before 7:30 a.m. If you are lucky, the bakery will serve you a sweet little appetizer while you are waiting in line. Once you get to the cashier, you can purchase two Cronuts per order. However, you can go back to the end of the line, wait again and purchase two more. If you don't want to wait in line, you can plan ahead and preorder the pastry online. Every Monday at 11 a.m. sharp, orders are taken for dates two weeks out. You will therefore wait longer for your pastry fix, but are allowed to purchase up to six Cronuts at a time.

Good Luck!

Isle of Man TT: The World's Most Dangerous Race

OWEN CLARK



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The spectrum of the “daredevil” has always been somewhat of a curiosity to me, particularly in the world of motorcycles. There are those that wouldn’t go near a bike if you paid them—I’ve met *plenty* in that category; those that ride, but are content with the confines of commuting; others such as myself, a former 250cc man that recently graduated to the beastly power of an inline-4 900cc engine, toeing the line in the “twisties” every once in a while—this alone might earn me the classification of daredevil in some eyes (read: my mum); weekend warriors who test themselves even further, laying rubber down on track days; and of course their professional counterparts that push the limits to extremes on the racetrack; but then there are those, known collectively as complete and utter lunatics, who race motorcycles at speeds approaching 200 miles per hour on tiny country roads lined with dry stone walls, telegraph poles, curbs, houses, and a whole host of other hazards, in the oldest, most dangerous race in the world—[The Isle of Man TT](#).

The Isle of Man TT Festival—TT stands for “Tourist Trophy”, or more colloquially “titanium ____” (I’ll let you fill in the blank)—takes place once a year during late May/early June, with a week of practice sessions followed by a week of individual races—culminating in the blue riband event, the senior TT. It has been in existence since 1907, though the current

Snaefell Mountain course wasn’t devised until 1911. It’s 37.73 miles run entirely on the Isle of Man’s public roads (closed during racing of course), through tiny villages, hedge-lined country lanes, and a mountain. It contains a staggering 265 corners, said to require at least three years of competitive racing to learn, where six laps amount to 226.5 miles of unflinching mental steel. The races consist of a time trial format, with riders competing as much against the course as the competition. Northern Irishman Michael Dunlop holds the honor of the fastest lap on record, taking just under seventeen minutes to complete the course at a jaw-dropping 133.962 MPH average speed last year. Kiwi Bruce Antsey achieved the unofficial record top speed of 206 MPH during practice. Eighty percent of the race is done at full throttle, which I can tell you as a biker, seems utterly unfathomable. Just *watching* an [on board lap](#) is enough to make you nauseous.

Often considered more infamous than famous, it has a reputation for its unparalleled danger. The mountain course has claimed 251 fatalities to date, with five deaths occurring just last year. Colorful character that he is, mutton-chopped racer/truck mechanic/TV personality Guy Martin refers to “that near-death thing” as the *raison d’être* of racing in the TT. On a

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NATURAL SELECTIONS WANTS YOUR ART!

Whether you can’t stop drawing while waiting for the bus, or taking a walk around the city; if photography is your passion, or if you’re more of a painter, this is your chance to share your art. Beginning in 2016, *Natural Selections* will publish a picture of the art we receive every month. To take advantage of this opportunity, email us your work with a title, a brief description, and your name. We’ll make sure to include it in a future issue. We hope to receive several images to create an open space for art!

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2010 crash that almost claimed his life—“The buzz from that was just unbeatable. That moment between crashing and almost dying. That’s raised the benchmark. I want to get back to that point. Money can’t buy it. Everything’s been so sanitised with bloody PC nonsense and health and safety that there’s nothing else is there? If it was dead safe I wouldn’t do it.” To others, this seemingly senseless loss of life provokes a rallying cry for banning the TT entirely. Indeed, safety concerns were a major factor in the race losing its world championship status in 1976.

If I’ve managed to pique your interest at this point, I would urge you to seek out the fascinating 2011 documentary [TT3D: Closer To The Edge](#) (the full movie is available on YouTube), or even better go one step further and read Rick Broadbent’s excellent book *That Near Death Thing* (which takes its name from Guy Martin’s quote). Even to those with little interest in motorcycle racing, it’s hard to deny the fascinating psychology at play here. Gaining a glimpse into what makes road racers risk life and limb for relatively little reward—through early footage of their childhood and interviews with both family members, those involved in the race, and the riders themselves, is a captivating experience. The supporting cast offers an engaging insight as to how people cope with the obvious elephant in the room, balancing the compulsion to race with the threat of death. We hear from the mechanic responsible for fine-tuning all of the top bikes’ engines, and the sense of guilt he feels, likening himself to a drug dealer supplying the fix that might ultimately end a rider’s life. There’s also a compelling interview with Bridget Dobbs, widowed after the death of her husband Paul Dobbs in the 2010 TT. Though left to raise their two children alone, she harbors an amazing resilience in knowing that Paul died doing what he loved, as to those in and around the TT, life is there to be lived, no matter what the risk.

Then there’s the main cast, a veritable band of misfits with a unifying compulsion to race, despite the inherent dangers. There’s stalwart talisman John McGuinness, whose un-athletic figure masks an exceptional talent that’s led him to a remarkable 23 TT wins, just three shy of the record held by the legendary Joey Dunlop. There’s Michael Dunlop—nephew of Joey, whose



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brother William (son of Joey) also races in the TT. Michael’s practically psychopathic racing instinct has brought him much success and notoriety in recent years, and the Dunlop family were the subject of the 2014 documentary [Road](#), narrated by Liam Neeson. Joey, known as much for his humanitarian work in the Balkans as for his gifts on two wheels, was tragically killed in a little-known road race in Estonia at the age of 48—paying the ultimate price for his steadfast refusal to hang up his leathers for good. His brother Robert (Michael’s father) was killed racing eight years later, and remarkably, a 20-year-old Michael raced and won the TT’s warm up event—The Northwest 200—just two days after burying his father. There’s soft-spoken Yorkshireman Ian Hutchinson—who recovered from nearly losing his leg after being run over by another racer in a closed-circuit race early on in his career, to eventually go on to achieve an unprecedented five wins at the 2010 TT. There’s local boy Connor Cummins, who survived a now [infamous crash](#) that left him looking like the Wiley Coyote in a full body cast, only to fully recover and compete in the TT the very next year. In truly legendary fashion, both of these men were told by doctors that they would never race again. Then of course there’s the resident controversy-magnet Guy Martin, whose trademark lack of filter, delivered through a nearly indecipherable Lincolnshire accent, has landed him a legion of fans, but sadly no TT wins so far.

Hollywood is said to be capitalizing

on the capacity for epic drama that exists on the Isle of Man, with a Ben Younger (*Boiler Room*, *Bleed for This*)—produced [movie](#) in the works, rumored to be centering on an American that comes out of retirement to race in the TT. If you replace “American” with “Canadian”, and “comes out of retirement” with “gives up everything to live on the island and race in the TT,” then this story slightly resembles the true-life tale of Mark Gardiner, who wrote about his experience ticking off the pinnacle of the biker’s bucket list in his 2012 book *Riding Man*.

All that being said, the [2017 Isle of Man TT](#) is fast approaching, with all the potential for a cracking set of races. As with many of the more niche sporting events, television coverage in the US leaves a bit to be desired. Despite a viewership of 30 million people worldwide, to my knowledge none of the practice sessions/races will be available for live viewing on a US TV network. However with a VPN you can access UK channel ITV’s coverage from their on-demand service, and YouTube has a dedicated channel that provides highlights of some of the races. Sharing five wins between them in 2016, Michael Dunlop and Ian Hutchinson are the men to beat, but after a year lay-off, the return of Guy Martin in search of his maiden win will add some tantalizing drama to the mix. No matter how the races play out, you can bet good money that the TT will never be short on excitement.

Culture Corner | On the 50th Anniversary of Sgt. Pepper's

BERNIE LANGS

Late 20th century philosophy took a long-winded detour from practical thought with its micro-analysis on the importance of the structure of language, but there is one idea that emerged that I find of great interest. It is the notion that once an author writes a work of literature and publishes it for a wide array of readers, in some manner the writer relinquishes his or her rights as the sole proprietor of the work. Since the reader is drawing from their own experiences, what is created in their minds brings whole new meanings, imaginations, and so on beyond the control of the original author's intention.

Along those lines, I would suggest that after The Beatles (George Harrison, Ringo Starr, Paul McCartney and John Lennon) laid down the instrumentation and vocals for the songs on the 1967 masterpiece *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* with George Martin producing and scoring the orchestral charts and Geoff Emerick at the helm as engineer, the meaning of the work was passed on to their multitude of listeners as individuals. What follows here is a song-by-song analysis of my personal notion of *Sgt. Pepper's*.

The LP opens to the sounds of a mulling crowd outdoors, awaiting the stage appearance of a good-time band, Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band. A distant, surreal wave of an accordion invites the listener to join the pleasant afternoon outing. After the misery of touring and the madness of Beatlemania, McCartney devised the concept of Sgt. Pepper's as a Beatles' alter-ego group, who would perform the album. The famous first lines, "It was twenty years ago today, Sgt. Pepper taught the band to play," nods to an imagined, sweet nostalgia. The guitars are on the heavy side and Martin introduces the first break with bold horns as the crowd elicits a peal of laughter to some antic on the bandshell they are witnessing.

McCartney enthusiastically tells us in his vocalization about what we will be hearing in the "live performance" to follow, and sends the cheering crowd off to listen to singer, "Billy Shears." We're seamlessly led next to the quieter studio sound of Starr singing *With a Little Help from My Friends*. The acoustics and overall sound of *Pepper's* is immediately discovered to be new for The Beatles. The mature period of the band began with its two previous albums, *Rubber Soul* and *Revolver*, each boasting revolutionary songwriting and production, but still maintaining a loose feel in sections. *Pepper's*, on the other hand, is musically and sonically perfect and The Beatles sang or played take



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Detail of the elusive back cover of Sgt. Pepper's with lyrics and The Beatles in full costume

after take to make sure it would be so. It's incredibly cleanly produced and also very tightly bound, as if the band knew their efforts would be examined and listened to for many decades. This near sterility contrasts sharply with The Beatles' swan song, *Abbey Road*, that is also technically perfect but very warm in production.

Starr sings his best ever vocal on *Friends*, and it is said the other members of the group were standing next to him as he sang, to lend confidence and support to the drummer. Beatles' biographer Hunter Davies was in the room when the song was composed and as the group threw around ideas for the lyrics. It is exciting to read his account of which ideas were encouraged and which were discarded.

Friends boasts lyrics about how we all support each other, and though it is very much a song about interpersonal relationships, there are some enigmatic ideas floating about. Lennon's *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds* is next in queue and veers the LP to the direction it will follow until completion. To call it "psychedelic" is accurate, but almost a bit of a trivialization. *Lucy* creates an incredible world of colors, situations, and improbabilities, with harmonized background singing experienced as if in a waking dream. Lennon's enthusiastic lead vocal invites us to this land of improbable wonders and McCartney's wandering bass line and chorus harmonies are strong. The tune's instrumentation is less than obvious, including

the fun, two-fingered ditties of an organ during the final robust rounds of the chorus.

The next three songs on side one are mostly McCartney-penned compositions, with touches of Lennon. *It's Getting Better All the Time* and *Fixing a Hole* approach a similar concept from different angles. McCartney's innate positive attitude bursts forward in *Getting Better* and Lennon tempers McCartney's cries of "I have to admit it's getting better, a little better all the time" with the choral harmony of "it can't get no worse." When the song goes dark, with a drone chord and the terrible admission of past cruelties to women, it soon returns with the promise of being set straight, life's course corrected. Harrison and Lennon power through *Getting Better* with tight chords played in unison on unexpected frets, adding sharp crispness to the verses that are relieved with the beauty and phrasing of the chorus.

After the uniquely abstract meditation of *Fixing a Hole*, we're brought to a song very much of the times, *She's Leaving Home*, which has no pop instruments at all, featuring strings and a prominent harp. It's a story of a young woman quietly slipping out of her parent's home, where her father awakens to find her note of goodbye to which he breaks down in tears. It reflects a generation taking leave of the customs of a stricter era while remaining sensitive to the pain caused to the families en-

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gulfed in the turbulence of the 1960s.

Side one of *Pepper's* concludes with Lennon's mischievous, dreamy, minor-keyed composition, *Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite*, much of which is lyrically borrowed from an old circus poster in Lennon's possession. For the solo portions, the Beatles created fascinating loops, which were activated at precise moments in the recording process, featuring all kinds of beautiful organ, keyboard, and primitive synth-like music that flows in and out and all over the mind of the listener.

Harrison's song *Within You Without You* opens side two with the drone of sitars and the beat of a tabla and other instruments from India. Harrison had found the spirituality of the Hindu religion and traveled to India to discover its history and culture. During the Sgt. Pepper's sessions and in subsequent years, Harrison's interest in the group often waned because he felt an impetus to follow a new spiritual journey of which being a Beatle was nothing but a hindrance. *Within You Without You* is a heavy meditation of life's purpose and on those who waste their time and chances to do good while on this earth. Yet it ends with a strange laughter, as if people at a small dinner party, having indulged in too much wine, laugh off their prior "deep" conversation.

McCartney follows with two delightful little ditties, the fun *When I'm Sixty-Four* featuring an awesome clarinet arrangement by Martin and the amusing *Lovely Rita* about a young man wooing a stern British meter maid, with an incredibly tasteful piano solo, also played by Martin. After the spacey finish

of *Rita* the album kicks into high gear towards its completion with Lennon's *Good Morning Good Morning*. The Beatles are looking at life in earnest here, the mundane slogans of a breakfast cereal mocked to reveal a strong and frustrated young man in his prime going through his day. "Nothing to do to save his life" Lennon sings, and we follow the youth as he flirts with women on the street and heads to town where "everything is closed it's like a ruin." Harrison unleashes a brief, brilliant and crazed guitar solo from which Lennon's flights of fancy return amid a brash Rock 'n' Roll horn section.

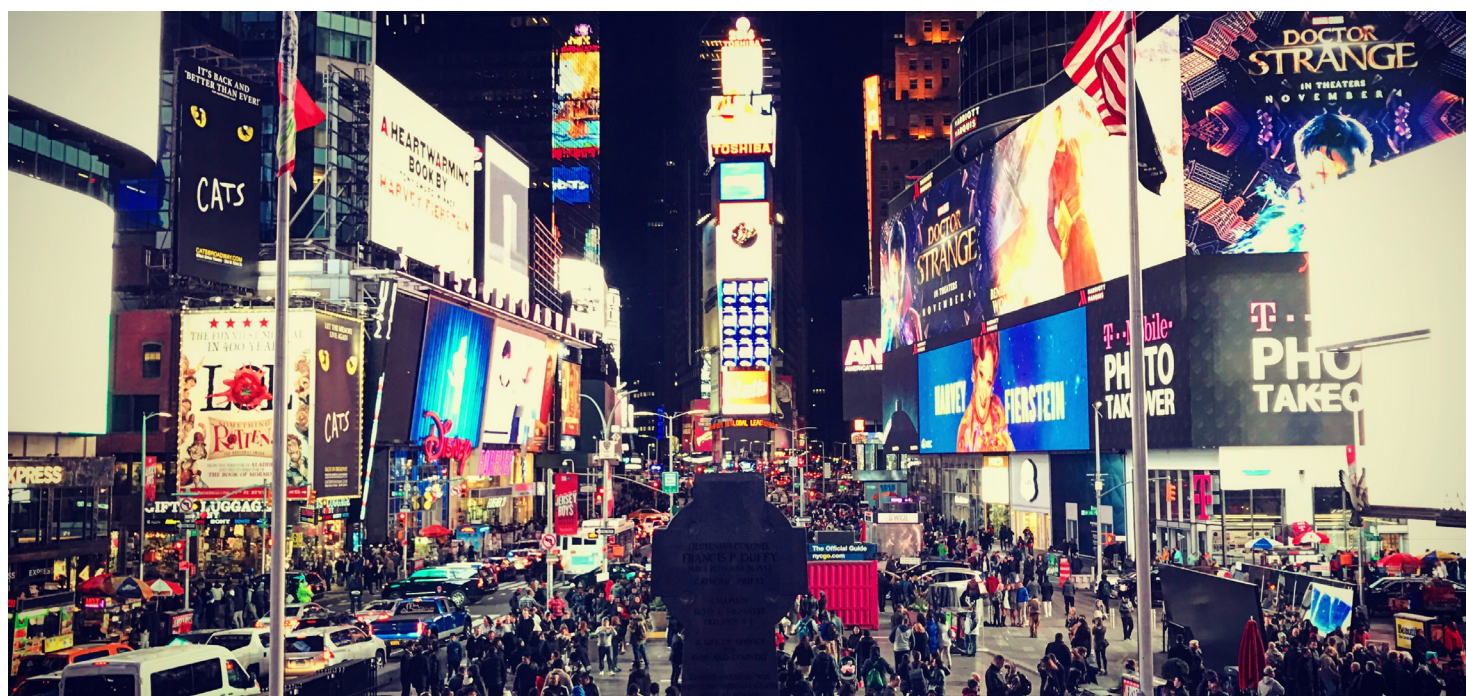
Good Morning has a famous fade-out where the madness of the repeated chorus gives way to sounds of barnyard animals, to a point at which a single clucking chicken is transformed into two loud guitar notes for the reprise of the opening song *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. The mock group of Sgt. Pepper's bids farewell to its outdoor audience, as the guitars pulse wildly and Starr pounds a basic four-four beat as if he's powering a huge airplane for liftoff.

Amid the sounds of the crowd cheering, Sgt. Pepper's band fades away in goodbye, and for the last track, The Beatles return as themselves, to play the masterpiece, *A Day in the Life*. Lennon wrote the song's backbone, with its poignant ruminations on bits and pieces he'd gleaned from newspaper or television stories and from his own acting experience in the Richard Lester film *How I Won the War*. There is a light and wistful, yet playful atmosphere to the recounting of sad news or oddities such as the discovery of "four thousand holes in Blackburn, Lancashire." The opening section segues

through a mad orchestration played by 40 musicians who were given the basic instruction to climb higher and higher on their instruments, but not in unison. Their climactic resolution flows into McCartney's section, which follows the day in the life of a working bloke. It initiates with the singing of "Got up, got out of bed, dragged a comb across my head," and ends with the profound frustration of this youth at his office, with McCartney strongly singing "Found my way upstairs and had a smoke, somebody spoke and I went into a dream," the dream being the reality of what happens during a day of rote work, of labor for labor's sake, a deflection and diversion from the mind's natural course.

McCartney's dream is enhanced by a tuneful melodic buildup by the orchestra and it bounces from its height back to Lennon's up-beat return with the main theme. The last lyric of the album, "I'd love to turn you on," brings back the rising, fast-paced orchestra, and *Sgt. Pepper's* ends with the orchestra's crescendo followed by a resolution chord played on five separate pianos by each Beatle and Martin. Their chords are pedaled to sustain until they can sustain no more, as if a distant thunder remains vaguely in the ear rippling on forever in the distance. I've never understood that chord, never comprehended why they chose to do it and why they chose to close out the album that way.

Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band is endless for me, I could listen to it every week for the rest of my life and love it on each occasion and hear new things each time with new ideas reigning down on my life. I find the whole thing blissful and often beyond structured thoughts or words.



What We Celebrate on 5th of May or *Cinco de Mayo*

GUADALUPE ASTORGA

We can appreciate Mexican culture in the United States like no other place in the world. We have all probably entered a shop in New York City and experienced the magical sensation of being instantaneously transported to Mexico. This is not only because cashiers are Mexicans wearing self-expressive t-shirts, or due to the language they speak, but it's also the traditional *rancheras* music they play, and their kindness that immerse us in such an inviting atmosphere.

It's no coincidence that Mexican culture today is deeply ingrained in the American one. This is not only because parts of the American Southwest belonged to Mexico less than 200 years ago, but also because a large number of Mexicans were incorporated into the US together with that land, bringing their own culture and traditions.

Some people think that *Cinco de Mayo* is Mexican Independence Day, but it's not. Independence from Spain was a 10-year process that ended in 1821 and is celebrated on September 16. Shortly after, Mexico was at war with the US, unsuccessfully defending its ownership over Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, and California (yes, almost half of current United States land). A treaty was signed in 1848, where Mexico gave up its sovereignty over those territories.

Years later, driven by the desire to extend the French empire to the Americas, the French army, led by Napoleon, attacked Mexico from the Atlantic coast. Outnumbered three times by the French forces, the Mexican army had little chance of success. After taking over several cities, the French advanced towards the Mexican capital, Mexico City. It was in the city of Puebla on May 5 that Mexican troops defeated the French in the heroic "Battle of Puebla" in 1862. After this,

the French army withdrew their forces from the country. This victory unified Mexico and restored a lost sense of nationalism and patriotism.

Although *Cinco de Mayo* is not a national holiday in Mexico, the states of Puebla and Veracruz have declared it a holiday where people preserve the traditions and celebrations of the day. So why celebrate it in New York City? Maybe it's due to the important

population present in the city who are native to the state of Puebla.

May 5 is a meaningful day for me, not only because important people in my life were born on that date, or because it's the name of the street where my mom grew up and where I have so many childhood memories, but also because it's the date that represents the improbable victory of the weak against the powerful.



GUADALUPE ASTORGA | Natural Selections

Quotable Quote

The saddest aspect of life right now is that science gathers knowledge faster than society gathers wisdom

Isaac Asimov c. 1920-1992



Photo Courtesy of Thomas Hawk CC

Life on a Roll

Wuhan University

QIONG WANG

Wuhan University, founded in 1893, is regarded as one of the most beautiful university campuses in China. Set by the peaceful East Lake, surrounding the Luo-jia Mountain, the campus spreads over 900 acres in the city of Wuhan, China. The palatial buildings of the university, blending Chinese and Western styles, have witnessed over 100 years of Chinese contemporary history. Many extraordinary scholars studied, worked and fought there, leaving their individual marks on the walls and floors. Walking on the rooftop of the historical dormitory building, and looking at the golden sunset beneath the flying roof-edge, I can't help but feel proud of the land where I had spent four years of my life.

Spring has finally arrived, and it's that time of the year again. Even from across the hemisphere, I can just imagine the rumbustious scene of thousands of visitors pouring into the campus for the cherry blossom spectacular.

