




Ready or not... Here I come



by *Kimberly J. Smith*

Master Photographer, Master Artist, Photographic Craftsman, Certified Professional Photographer







For Lisa,
My sister, My friend...
Always.



“Ready or not... here I come” she would yell as she began her long search to find me. I was always a little short and small for my age and that seemed to work out in my favor to find many great hiding places. It was my favorite game. For me, being a 6-year-old, it was way easier to fit into tight spaces than my sister Lisa, who was three and a half years older than me and about twice my height. My favorite place to hide was in the kitchen cabinets with all the pots and pans. It was a challenge to be able to quietly move them around without making noise and hide behind them. Sometimes, when I hid so well, and she couldn't find me, I would fall asleep waiting. So of course, there were times she would give up. However, most of the time, she would find me, and we would continue to play for hours. Now don't get me wrong, she and I had our moments, many of them actually. I was an annoying little sister, and she was a bossy big sister. We were best friends, constant playmates, and at times, one would think arch enemies...but always sisters.

The image “Ready or not” was created as a beautiful reminder to not only myself, but for anyone who sees it to remember the carefree days of childhood, when running and playing outside was the only thing that mattered.



"Bedlam"



*Having a sister means sharing things you don't want to share and fighting over... well, everything.
Being a sister also means having a best friend, a constant companion, someone you can laugh with, play with, and
share your deepest secrets with. Sisters... I wouldn't trade it for anything.*

As children, our daddy always had a camera in hand, documenting our family vacations and our lives. This led to my love of photography. I am beyond grateful for the many memories that have been captured and preserved for me and for future generations who will enjoy them. I have always enjoyed looking through old pictures, wondering what the stories are and what the person in the portrait was like. Knowing that someday, many years down the road, people will wonder the same about portraits of my family and me. It is amusing to me to see the hair and clothing styles during the time that I was growing up. We all laugh and wonder how it was ever possible that anyone could like *that* look, yet we watch those same styles come and go, time after time. Regardless of the funny hair styles, the obvious lack of clothing consultations, and at times not the best posing, I am blessed that my parents captured those moments in time. Moments that might seem childish, like a simple game of hide and seek or sisters laughing and whispering secrets, just some of the memories I will always cherish.

Growing up, I always loved art. Drawing was something I realized I could do at an early age. So, when I entered high school, Art and Yearbook were 2 classes I made sure were on my schedule. My art teacher, Linda Wilson, was my favorite and I enjoyed going to her class every day. I learned so much about art history, design, lighting, shadows and highlights and more information than I probably even realize. All of this, coming from a high school art class. In my yearbook class I learned to use film and it was my first experience with developing my own images in a darkroom. My favorite part was capturing images and designing layouts. Looking back on that time, I know that God had a plan, and He was preparing me for what was to come.

"The Journey"



***began with a painting of a beautiful flower. It was enough on its own.
But adding in a story is what I love to do. The addition of the tiny little ladybug
made the image complete for me. It was such a minor change.
But that minor change gave the image its name, a story.
You may never understand the difficulties this life may bring.
But every twist and every turn is shaping you, molding you into the person
you are intended to be. Learn to relax and enjoy the journey.***





I graduated from high school in 1990 and then college in 1994, with a Bachelor of Arts in Youth and Family Services. I never actually used my degree in the way I intended. I got married, and a year and a half later, we had our first daughter, Emily. I adored her and loved being a stay-at-home mom. Two and a half years later, we had our second daughter, Lyndsay and 22 months after that, our third, Haylee. At the time, my only experience with a professional photography studio was Wal-Mart. While I wish I had more creative, striking images of my daughters, I am thankful for the memories and portraits I do have, created by their studio. It wasn't until a friend from church, J.C. Little, who was a photographer, offered to do portraits of my children that I realized there were other options out there. He did a wonderful job, and it was at that moment that I decided I wanted to be able to create beautiful images of my children myself. I had started doing scrapbooks for my children, documenting their growth and beauty. With a \$20 camera as the source of creating these "works of Art," I am sure you can imagine that my images were lacking in the area of technical excellence. So, the search for the perfect camera was on. I chose to purchase a 35 mm Minolta. It was the camera I had dreamed of, or so I thought. My love of scrapbooking quickly turned to a passion for creating images. Thus, began my journey with photography.

"Enchanting"



And for a moment... just a moment, she was fearless. Her eyes were opened, her mind was clear, and she knew, without an ounce of doubt, that the path she had chosen was destined for greatness.







After the purchase of my new camera, my images started looking more like what I had envisioned in my mind, and I started enjoying the process of learning light. My pastor's wife at the time, Dene' Hopkins, encouraged me to look into starting a business. It was then that I began to consider the option of photography as a career. I am a firm believer that God places certain people in your life at just the right time. With a gentle push from the nest, Dene' gave me a business card of a photographer she had been introduced to. I called and met with this photographer who was from Tulsa, a 45-minute drive from where I live in Muskogee. She began to share with me all the information I needed to get started in this business. She gave me the information for professional labs and in particular Millers Professional Imaging, who I have been with now for 20 years. I am thankful for not only the influence and the inspiration that she has had on my life and business, but for the friendship Shannon Ledford and I have shared for the last 20 years. She is a true friend.

I was introduced to the professional world of photography in 2001. I was informed that my "dream" camera, was in fact ...not. I was also told where and how I could begin my education, and I listened. With no schooling or training in the field of photography, I stepped out on faith and purchased the proper equipment to start my business. My Mamiya 645 AF was my first professional camera, and I was in love. I am grateful that I had the opportunity to learn film before heading into the wonderful world of digital.







As I began attending class after class, workshop after workshop, I realized that no matter who, what or where it came from, I learned something new every single step of the way. The most valuable advice I could have received from anyone came at the perfect time: the very beginning. I was told that the best learning I could possibly experience was to sit in on and eventually participate in competition. I was hooked from day one. Competition sparks something in me to try harder, to do what I can, to give it my best. But at times, what I thought was “my best” was far from it, and that’s ok. The journey to learning is half the fun. The pain, the 79’s, the try again’s and the try harder’s... they push me.

Competition brought new and exciting opportunities. I was introduced to painting images digitally with Photoshop and Corel painter. My first class I took was in 2002 with Don Emmerich and Nancy Mickle (now Emmerich), two people I have come to admire and love. I didn't know a thing when I signed up, and I left there with a wealth of information and inspiration. I have gone on to study under many great instructors and friends who have added so much to who I have become creatively. I am truly grateful for their time and willingness to give unselfishly.

As my photography business grew and changed, so did my family life. I endured a painful divorce, was blessed with the arrival of my first son, Logan and a new marriage to Chris, who had his own 3 children, Kelsey, Lane and Sydney. Going from three to seven children, all under the age of 10, was a huge change. While at times it was hectic, loud and chaotic, I wouldn't trade it for anything. I feel blessed beyond words.



*In the image "Hidden Treasure,"
there are 3 eggs tucked neatly into the nest. All unique and special.
But there is a 4th one, unseen. Some of the best gifts we receive are
those that are unexpected.*

In 2008, I received my Master of Photography degree from PPA by entering my client work and images of my children. I know the common consensus is that you should not enter images of your own children. However, I have thick skin and although I may be a bit biased, I have beautiful children and I loved creating portraits and art with them as my models. Besides, they *are* my favorite subjects. In 2013, I received my Photographic Craftsman degree. It was a great accomplishment for me, considering I never thought I would be a public speaker. Talking in front of people terrified me. I realized that when it is something you are passionate about, it comes easy. Six months after receiving my Craftsman, I was accepted as a PPA approved Affiliate Juror. Judging competitions has been such a huge inspiration, and it has made me a better photographer. I love every part of it. In 2016, I walked the stage and received my Master Artist degree along with Imaging Excellence. It has forced me to use my imagination and creativity more, and I have truly enjoyed this journey. Every step I have taken to work towards another PPA degree has resulted in a tremendous growth in the quality of my work. Therefore, I see it as a challenge and a benefit to continue in education.

“Breakfast in Bed”



There. In that moment. It is when you realize that all the things you love in life will change. And change is good. Change is inevitable. But in that moment... you have everything. Remember it. Cherish it. For as long as you possibly can.

Normal life, for me, has changed over the last couple of years. I had to make the difficult decision to end my marriage with a man I still love due to the disease of alcoholism. Life is tough. But I have realized through this struggle, that so am I. I cannot change someone else...I can only change myself. Although change can be hard, it can also be good. I have transitioned my business to more of what I love; teaching, creating fine art pieces and commissioned art portraits, allowing me the opportunity to spend more time at home with my son in the 3 short years of high school we have left together. There will be plenty of time to focus on my business, but right now, I am focusing on making memories.

“Masking her Pain”



*My heart is breaking. But I say I'm doing fine. I'm tired of faking, I am broken inside.
Keep my head above water, I'm trying not to drown. I just keep on hoping, But I'm afraid I'm losing ground. I can't
keep them silenced, these voices in my head. And what they're screaming, is better left unsaid.*

Photography has become my passion. I enjoy all types of images, anywhere from a simple black and white to a complex painted piece. There is beauty in all. Creating images for my clients that will not only document that time in their lives but will also capture a beautiful story of who they are, and to do it as creatively as I can, is what I am passionate about. Anyone can take a picture, but that is it not my goal. It is about capturing their personality, capturing their soul that drives me. Being able to show real relationships and that connection in a photograph is the essence of what I strive for. To me, creativity is having the vision to see beyond what is merely in front of you, bringing those thoughts and ideas together in any form of art that will speak to the heart of those who choose to listen. And I so want people to listen. When I see an image that makes my heart race, makes me laugh or brings tears to my eyes, that artist or photographer, in my opinion, has done their job very well. *That* is my passion.



I have enjoyed photographing many types of people and situations over the years: babies, children, families, and high school seniors. It has been a journey; one I will always think back on with pride. Some of my favorite portraits I have created have been those showing a connection between subjects, relationships, friendships, and especially sisters. Having three daughters of my own, they became my little, constant models over the years. I absolutely adore the images I have created that have shown their relationship with each other; the relationship that I too had with my sister growing up. Images that evoke an emotion and bring back feelings and memories are inspiring and sentimental. Images that show the love, the connection, the laughter, the good times and the hard times, speak to me. A portrait of a little girl, cuddled up to her dog, taking a nap. A delicate painting of birds nestling together. A gentle moment of sisters taking the time to hold hands and pray before the wedding day, shows a real moment in time that is so simple, yet so endearing.

These moments... they stay with you, in your heart. In my heart and in my memories is the relationship I now have with my sister. Lisa lost her battle with cancer on May 15, 2013, at the age of 44. In everything I have accomplished, my sister was an encourager, cheering me on. She has been, and always will be missed and loved. I know her arrival in Heaven was a grand one and she was greeted with "well done my good and faithful servant." I can only hope to be as good a person and Christ follower as she was on this earth. I do my best to keep Him as my center. For without my faith in God and the unconditional love that he gives, I would have nothing.



"Leaving with Dignity"

And the day will come when it's time to leave this world.

***Leave with dignity. Leave with pride, knowing that the life you lived, the life you shared,
was the life you loved.***

My photography journey has taken me many places. I have been up on the mountain top. I have been down in the valley. I have competed and failed, and I have competed and soared, from 76's to 100's and many in between. But it goes beyond a score, a trophy, a Loan Collection image or even an ASP Fellowship... It makes me push harder, search deeper and has made me a better, stronger, more creative person. I am loving the place where I am right now, excited to see what's around the corner and I am here to say, "Ready or not... here I come."

Respectfully,



Kimberly J. Smith



Thank you...



I would like to thank the many people who have poured into my life. You have made me stronger and more aware of what and who I am. I love and appreciate every one of you. Thank you for being you and thank you for loving me.

Biography

Kimberly J. Smith began her professional photography career in 2001 in Muskogee, Oklahoma. With no formal training, she stepped out on faith, purchased her professional equipment and began taking classes. Photography soon became a passion and she quickly learned that creating beautiful portraits and art was what she was meant to do.

As a member of her local, state, regional and national Professional Photographer associations, she soon earned her Master of Photography degree and Photographic Craftsman degree and became a PPA Affiliated Juror. In 2014 she became a Certified Professional Photographer. In January of 2016, she received her Master Artist degree and Imaging Excellence. She truly believes in lifelong learning and that every competition and every journey to a new degree has pushed her to become a better, more creative photographer.

Judging, competition, creating art and photography is her passion, and her family is her love. With seven super loud but loving teenagers/young adults, life can be a bit chaotic, but she wouldn't have it any other way. She is blessed to have a job she truly loves.



Degrees and Recent Accomplishments

1994 Bachelor of Arts in Youth and Family Services
2008 PPA Master of Photography
2013 PPA Photographic Craftsman
2013 PPA Affiliated Juror
2014 Certified Professional Photographer
2016 PPA Master Artist
2016 PPA Imaging Excellence
2019 Imaging Excellence bar
(7x) Oklahoma Master Photographer of the year
(6x) Oklahoma Artist Photographer of the year
(4x) Southwest Professional Photographer of the year
(6x) Ozarks Professional Photographer of the year
(13x) PPA Photographer of the year (silver, gold, platinum, diamond and double diamond)
40 published Loan Collection images
(12x) PPA Grand Imaging Award Top 10
(16x) PPA Grand Imaging award
(2x) Kodak Gallery Elite winner
2017 Canon Par Excellence
(5x) Lexjet Sunset Award
(3x) Southwest Certified Professional Photographer of the year,
(8x) Oklahoma Certified Professional Photographer of the year,
(5x) American Society of Photographers State Elite Award and District Medallion Award
(1x) American Society of Photographers Gold and Silver Medallion
2021 American Society of Photographers 1st place children, 1st
2021 American Society of Photographers 1st and 2nd place Best of Show
2021 Canon/Lexjet 2 category 1st place and Best of Show
2021 Children's book (being released in November 2021 by a traditional publishing house)