# BENEATH YOUR *beautiful*

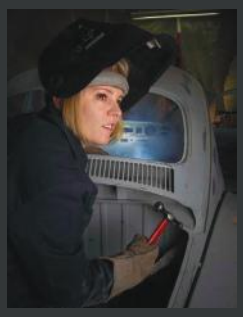
MAR/APR 2024 ISSUE 14



YOU'RE BEAUTIFUL




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**BeneathYourBeautiful.org**

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**At *Beneath Your Beautiful*, we are committed to spreading positivity and hope and improving lives through raw and compassionate storytelling.**

If you, or someone you know, has a story to share, please reach out to **hara@BeneathYourBeautiful.org**

**FRONT COVER**

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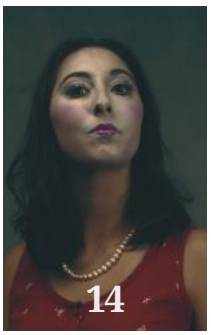
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**Taylor Buchmann**
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PHOTOGRAPHER **Hara Allison**
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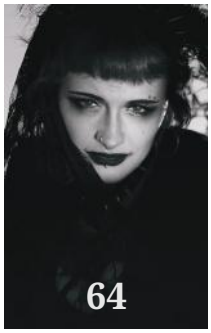

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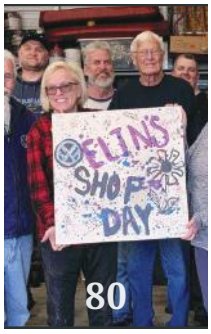

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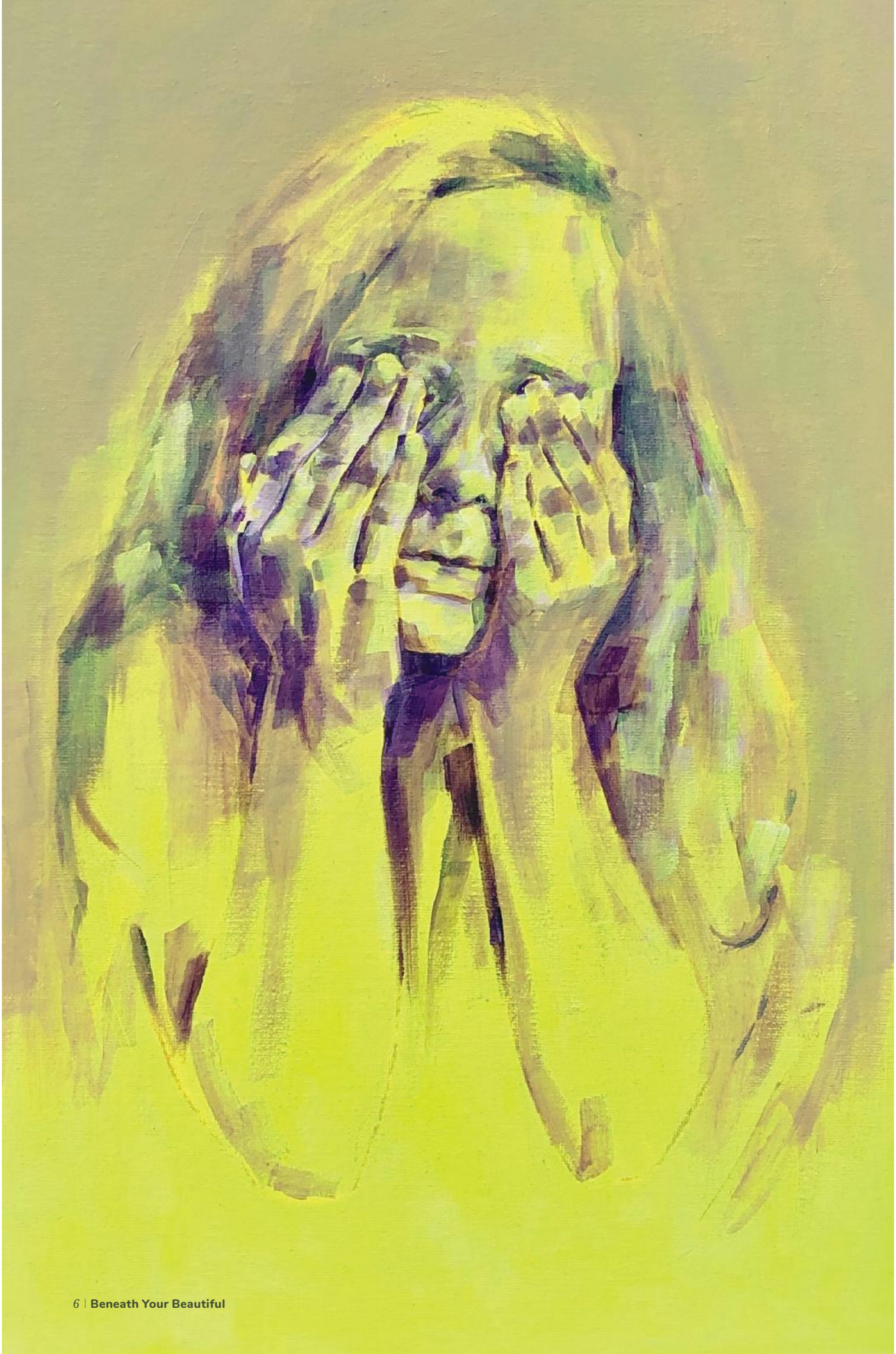
self portrait

# Florence Lee is a Bristol based figurative and portrait artist.

Flo is influenced by modern day expressionist figurative artists who focus on the visibility of brushstrokes within a painting. Her fascination for the visible inner engineering and process of a painting came from seeing more traditional artwork at a young age. The pursuance of making every mark count, some paintings with more details than others, is what Flo is aiming for.

Interested in the ability our minds have to complete unfinished lines and areas of paintings, Flo often intentionally leaves areas raw or underdeveloped. She mainly works in acrylic and charcoal and likes to explore their properties. She is a prolific creator, drawing or painting almost every day. While finding it meditative, she also feels it is necessary for her to reach her skill level goals.

Flo aims to create art that is approachable, unpretentious and interesting. She herself admires art for its aesthetic and technical values, and appreciates art that has a message or statement to convey, but it is by no means a compulsory quality for her enjoyment. She →



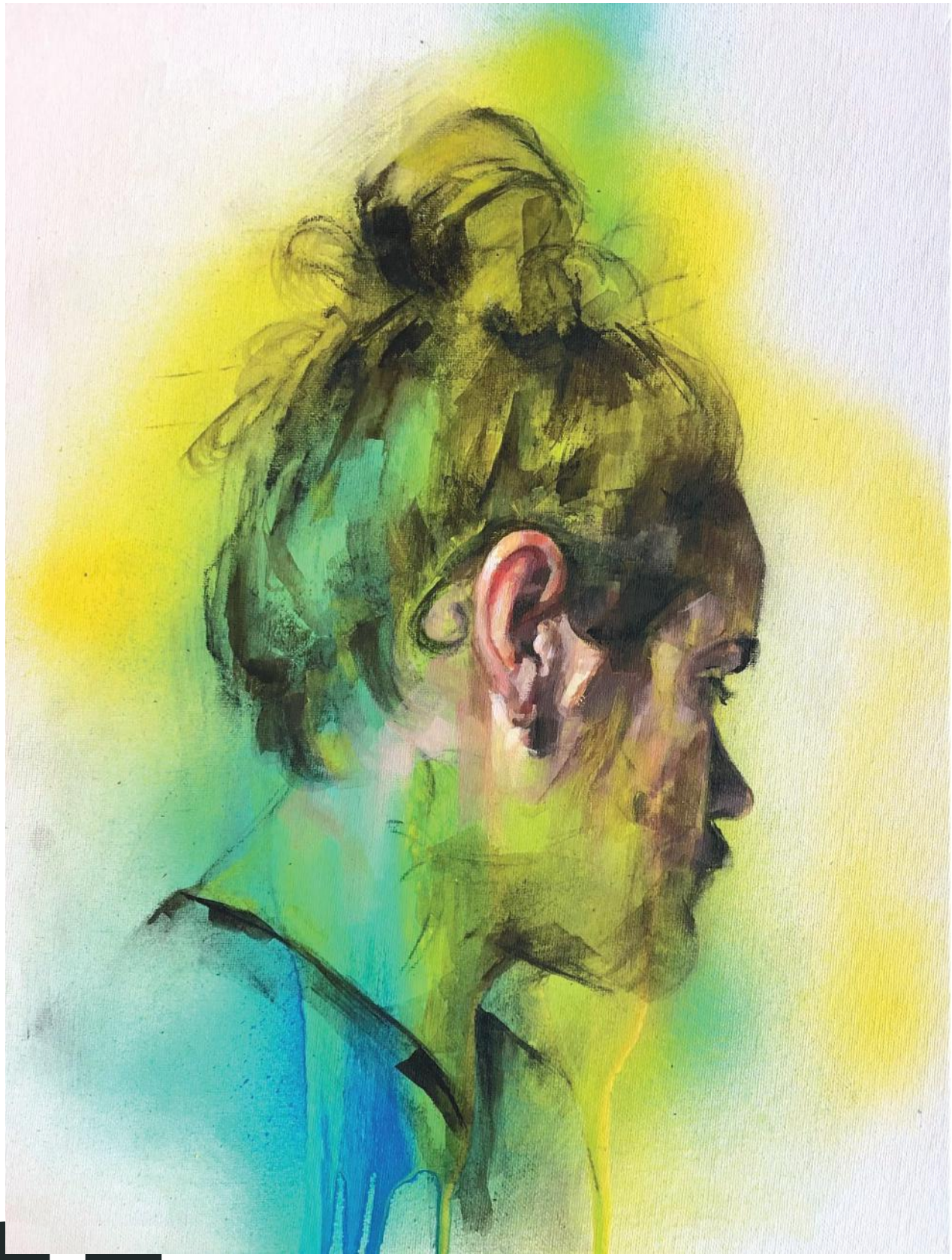


studied for her foundation Fine Art Degree in Bristol and finished her studies by achieving a Fine Art diploma. Since becoming a full-time artist, she has held exhibitions, been featured in magazines, designed an album cover, created an art workshop, and had her work published in an art book.

Following these achievements, Flo was commissioned to create pieces for a London theater and created an online creative community called “Small Voice.”

She continues to master her craft, and in her future practice, hopes to reach more people: those who enjoy art both on face value and those who choose to seek a deeper meaning. After 15 years since completing her studies, she returned to art and strives to inspire others to relentlessly pursue their passion as she has hers.

Her original artworks, commissions, and prints, have been collected internationally, and she plans to exhibit more in the future. ▮

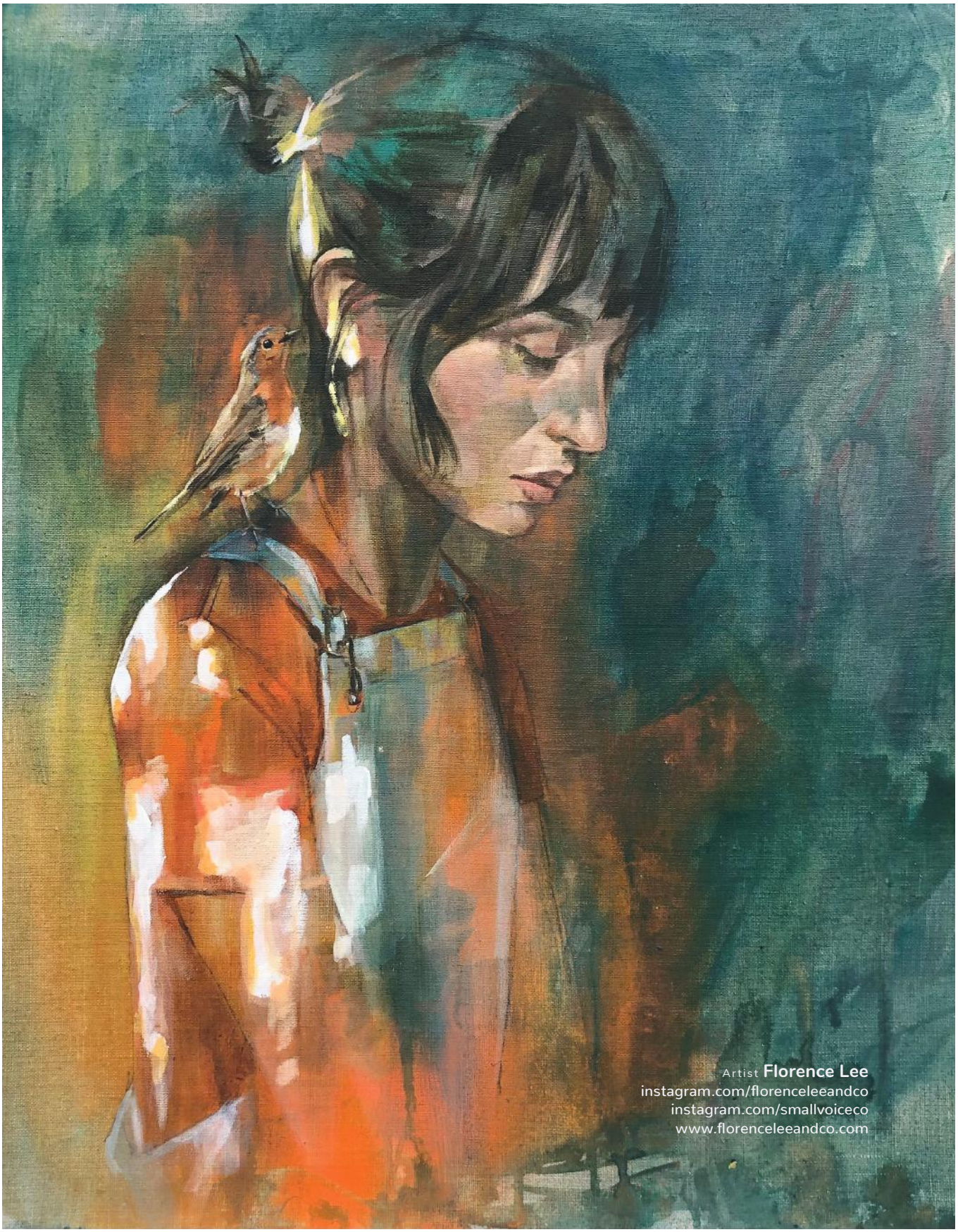


flore








Artist Florence Lee
instagram.com/florenceleeandco
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# THE STORYTELLER





My journey as a photographer started three years ago in my building basement with my neighbor as model. I have since continued my quest for purpose and excellence. Photography is my way to express the creativity that sommeils deep inside of me. I have explored, studied other photographers, tried to learn from my peers, but most and foremost I have let my imagination and desire to create take over. I do not know how far I will go yet, but I am sure that one day I will get there. This is what drives me.

For this photo series, I wanted to create an imaginary world, something that combines dream, confusion, and wonder. Of course this journey would not have been possible without the help of two amazing people who share my vision: model Alexias and makeup artist Hector Garcia

PHOTOGRAPHER **Philippe Lesuisse**
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MODEL **Athasephomis**
instagram.com/athasephomis

MAKEUP ARTIST **Hector Garcia**
instagram.com/the.glam.guy
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theglamguy.com


NEWS




“Creativity is the language we use
to communicate the urgency of
our dreams for a better future.”
AUDRE LORDE



# Fenton Reese

**Fenton Reese**, known as Captured Freedom, is a former Combat Correspondent (United States Marine Corps Photojournalist) who spent his term traveling the world capturing unseen moments, unknown faces, and telling untold stories.

After completing his military service, he broke away from photography to pursue youth work and music. In recent years, his passion for photography reemerged. He is now focused on creating art in multimedia formats and capturing the beauty and freedom that is often forgotten in a chaotic world.

PHOTOGRAPHER **Captured Freedom**
instagram.com/capturedfreedom
instagram.com/jazzmazing
www.cfshots.co

MODEL **Jasmine Baldwin**


ART of
JAZZ


30
KODAK PORTA 800
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# In My Sober Solitude

*by Bailey D. Bowerman, Esq.*

**When I drank my classic Tito's with soda water, a splash of white grapefruit juice, and lime at Cricket's on November 3, 2021, I had no idea it would be my last one.**

If you ask me for the official reason I stopped drinking, I'll tell you that I did so on the recommendation of my naturopath to support my efforts to heal my gut and hormones. I was (and still am) battling major gut and hormone imbalances. When she made it clear that my all-too-regular greyhounds were impeding the healing process, I knew it was time for a change.

The not-so-official truth is that I wasn't living the life I wanted with alcohol. I can't say I was an alcoholic, but I also can't say I had a healthy relationship with alcohol. I think this gray area is a tough one and one that more folks than we assume find themselves in. I fell into the category of social drinker but it wasn't a habit that supported my goals, honored my body, or allowed for true self awareness.

While my waning health and desire to conceive had greatly curtailed my drinking in the months leading up to my last greyhound, I still viewed alcohol as a given, a necessity, and a luxury all in one. I couldn't imagine navigating holidays, parties, or networking events without this support. At first, this change felt like a huge sacrifice and a social handicap.

When faced with leaving booze in the rearview, I KNEW I would become a social pariah, lose all of my friends, and fall into insignificance along with skinny jeans and skinny brows.

I muddled through my first sober holidays by pure grit and ached every time I turned down a drink or toasted with water. I was sheepish, assuring folks it was only due to health issues. I'm pretty sure I even planned a pink greyhound themed party for when I could drink again.

I didn't even question why I felt the need to apologize for my choice not to imbibe. I slipped easily into a posture characterized by shame and deprecation. On a visit to Las Vegas, I was unsurprised by the judgemental looks and half expected the hot tea I ordered at each meal and cocktail hour to come with instructions for penance to the gods of relevance and sophistication.

I wish I could say that none of my fears →

materialized, that they were unfounded because all of my friends saw positive changes in me and loved me unconditionally, that I learned quickly to have the same kind of fun without booze, that my social life didn't skip a beat, and I spent many nights dancing, fueled by only water and good vibes until 2am.

Unfortunately, a lot of my fears did materialize.

I found myself invited to less and less outings, as I realized I related to less and less of the people in my inner circle. I found myself being left out of more and more plans and drifting away from friends I thought would be lifelong companions. Perhaps the most painful realization was that I didn't get the same pleasure from wild nights out as I once had. It wasn't that I didn't enjoy dressing up, gabbing, dancing, and meeting new people, but I noticed the chaos of drunken nights more acutely. I became more aware that conversations stayed in the shallow end of the pool after more than 2 drinks. Things changed quite a bit, and I found myself alone a lot more.

My life will never be the same, and I took time to mourn that. I mourned the previous version of myself, my old identity, the relationships I lost, the activities I missed, and the lifestyle I thought I'd maintain. I allowed myself to feel disappointed in myself for changing and in my friends for not being on the same page. Then, I found space for gratitude and was able to fully welcome this new life and new version of myself.

It took almost a year for me to stop missing my greyhounds after a rough day, cocktails on the boat, and spiked coffees on the weekends. I spent a long time wishing I could be normal, reliving and recounting stories about wild nights out, and lamenting my inability to order craft cocktails on vacation, but I slowly realized how much I gained by giving up booze. It wasn't until I was fully adjusted to this new lifestyle that I began to question things. I started to take stock of my life over the past two years, and I realized that my life had improved astronomically. I might not be normal, but the Bailey I know now is better. The time alone, unclouded by any mind-altering substance, allowed me to get to know myself, sit with uncomfortable truths, make changes, and form my own opinions. I realized that I don't actually want the life I thought I wanted.

As I write this, more than two years into the process, I am more surprised than anyone when I say that I don't miss drinking most of the time. Sometimes I miss the taste and the cozy confidence, but that small ache is outweighed by the stuff I do not miss. I do not miss the blackouts, the anxiety, the hangovers (that I said I didn't get, but I know now that I was just that out of touch with my body), the friends I only related to when intoxicated, and the constant drama I invited into my life. I don't miss the gut pain during and after each drink, and I don't miss feeling inflamed constantly.

Here is just a smattering of the specific changes I've noticed:

- I get fewer invites to wild nights out and boozy brunches, but I get plenty of invites to tea dates, spa days, and yoga classes.
- I did lose some friends, but I gained more authentic connections.
- I experience far less anxiety, and that's not only because I wake up every morning knowing exactly what happened the night before. I'm not forcing my body to constantly detox, so I feel calmer and less anxious overall.
- I feel much more connected to my body and its cues for hunger and rest, because I stopped numbing my emotions and my body's cues. I may have lost the luxury of alcohol as a social lubricant, but I also





quieted the noise drowning out the oft quiet voice of my greatest ally. Now, I can hear when my body speaks to me, and I can meet its needs rather than reaching for a greyhound to make me feel artificially confident, warm, and fuzzy.

- My confidence increased as I learned to navigate social settings sober. Because I was forced to be fully present in all situations, from parties and awkward family gatherings to runway shows and networking events, I showed myself that I could handle a lot more than I thought I could.
- I started liking myself because I gave myself space to feel instead of masking emotion with a buzz, and I started doing what I said I'd do, and I started thinking for myself.

The unfortunate side effect of these benefits is that I simply do not function the same way I once did. I don't have the same motivations, and I crave a level of connection and conversation that my old haunts and habits can't provide. I can't really blame my friends for distancing themselves or choosing not to include me in their wild plans. I no longer make much sense in that world. Thus, I existed in my sober solitude.

Before we get too far, let's pause to address the question on everyone's minds. *Am I trying to get you all to give up your nightcap, your celebratory bubbles, and your boat beverages?* The short answer is ABSOLUTELY NOT.

I don't think drinking is inherently wrong, and I can't say I'll never drink again. It merely does not serve me currently, and I don't foresee a net gain from adding it back in right now. I am a proud survivor of a multiple decade long battle with disordered eating, and I can't overlook the obvious connection between my restrictive relationship with food and both my frenetic relationship with alcohol and regular blackouts. As I admitted above, I can't say I was an alcoholic, but I also can't say I had a healthy relationship with alcohol. The bottom line is that I think our decisions about alcohol, food intake, and movement are all inherently personal, and each person should pay attention to how their body functions best and what decisions fit with their lifestyle and goals.

For example, people often ask me if I'm bothered by my husband Blake drinking. I think I surprise them when I say that I am not at all bothered by the beer he cracks open each night. I believe that Blake possesses beautiful wisdom and doesn't need me micromanaging his drinking or any part of his life.

I should begin by noting that Blake is a grown, independent man. I have no more control over him and his habits than I do over the US economy. I'm his wife, his partner, his support, and his equal, but I am not his mother. I have no desire to control or manipulate him as if he were a dog or a child (and honestly, we shouldn't be treating children that way either).

Blake and his healthy relationship with both food and alcohol lie in stark contrast to my formerly dubious relationship with both. He approaches booze with balance, listens to his body, and indulges responsibly. This is a wild concept for someone like me, but he is able to drink regularly and almost never to excess.

Just as I've been so careful never to impose my dietary restrictions (once self-imposed, now medically-imposed) on Blake, I refuse to impose my choice about alcohol on him. I'd hate to get in the way of his connection with his body's cues, his neutral relationship with indulgences (whether that be Coor's Light or Reese's), or his ability to enjoy pleasure in moderation.

For all of these reasons, and so many more, I gladly keep multiple refrigerators stocked with beer and our snack cabinet full

of his favorite sweets. Life is about balance and moderation and diversity of thought and habit and preference. As I learn to be a better partner, a more conscious community member, and a more fully realized person, I have leaned into the idea that what is best for me isn't necessarily what is best for Blake or anyone else, and I can live with that duality.

With all of that being said, I began to question the place of honor that we have given to alcohol. Almost every social event revolves around drinking. We are inundated from a young age with messages and images showing us that drinking is sophisticated and worldly and edgy and sexy and fun. We demonize sugar and carbs, and we carefully source our food, but we never question making room for a cocktail or a glass of wine. College is basically four years of drinking punctuated by sober moments in class. We all love to point to the prohibition era as evidence that not drinking is not an option, and those who choose to abstain are labeled as religious freaks, squares, or damaged goods. It makes people uncomfortable when you choose not to drink, even if you are happy to sip water or tea and go with the flow.

I wonder, why is the default drinking? Why do the sober and the sober curious feel so isolated? Why are all of the fun activities, celebrations, and banner moments so closely linked with drinking? Why is the decision not to drink such a controversial one?

These are the rebellious questions I was asking when I learned that I am not alone. There are growing numbers who limit or completely cut out booze. The sober curious movement encourages us to pause and ask why we're drinking before we do so. In fact, generation Z drinks less than older generations and is the fastest growing demographic consuming non-alcoholic drinks.

Something inside me lept when I learned of alcohol-free night life. I saw that it was

**I think I surprise them when I say that I am not at all bothered by the beer he cracks open each night.**

taking off in major cities and felt that excited Christmas morning feeling. When I scrolled through the quintessential blurry, glamorous pictures, I learned that entire groups of people were choosing to go out and NOT drink. I love my new-found presence and my commitment to mental and physical wellness, but I do miss the bubbly, sparkly nights out. I miss getting ready and heading out, wondering who I'll run into. I miss dancing my face off with friends and scanning menus of carefully curated drinks. I miss holding a beautifully crafted cocktail in a heavy glass and enjoying that first sip. I miss the blurry pictures and the lights.

It turns out that it's possible to have all of this without the booze, hangovers, and regret. We just need to create space for it. We just need to shift the way we think about fun and alcohol. Instead of asking *why is this freak not drinking?* we would be asking *why am I drinking today?* or *do I want to drink today?*

From these thoughts, Diversion Events was born. While I saw alcohol-free events succeed in larger cities, my own city had nothing like this. I was lamenting this very thing when my dear friend Christine Burns-Harrison suggested we fix it ourselves. We did just that.

We welcome all. Whether you're sober, sober-curious, sober for today, or simply an outside-the-box thinker looking for community and festivity sans booze, WE GOT YOU.

The words dry event may conjure up horrifying pictures of church basements, multi-purpose rooms, and cramped family rooms with bad coffee, and stale donuts–all soaked in the awkward energy of reluctant ⟶

sobriety. In today's culture, it seems your choices are THAT or the classic bar or club scene that is sexier, shinier, and lubricated by booze. We provide a third option.

Diversion Events are intentionally dry and effortlessly edgy. We do not seek to replicate conventional social scenes but to fill a gap with something completely new. We provide an alternative (a diversion, if you will) to the bars, clubs, and boozy brunches by curating a high-end atmosphere, complete with high vibes, quality beverages, and enthralling entertainment.

We rebel against and divert from the norm, creating something new. Imagine a night out or a Sunday brunch where vibes are high, your body is honored, and your buzz is achieved through atmosphere and authentic connections.

Our aim is to provide a space where folks who choose not to drink, whether it be for one night or one month or a whole lifetime, aren't outsiders anymore. The mocktails aren't a tiny afterthought on the back corner of the menu; they are the main event. Dancing is fueled by excitement, camaraderie, and true confidence. Conversations go deep, connections are made, and it's all remembered the next morning.

After our first event in January of 2024, I felt like I had come home. I felt like I finally recovered the piece of my life that was missing for two years. I found all of the revelry of a night out that I had missed and avoided the regret and anxiety and stomach ache the next morning. I found the sparkly, bubbly anticipation I missed so much. I danced my face off, and I learned that I'm about as bad at dancing sober as I am at dancing drunk. I had the edgy club experience, and my body didn't pay the price. I made connections and found a community.

I hope this changes our weekends. I hope that folks who have chosen not to drink wear that choice with pride rather than shame or timidity. I hope that we shift our collective perspective on alcohol. I'm not calling for prohibition or a clan of teetotallers, but I'd love to see more spaces where drinking is not the default decision, where there are multiple beautiful alcohol-free choices, where drinking is merely one of many options, and the goal is connection, recreation, and enhancing life, rather than dulling our senses and escaping life for the night.

I also hope that no one else will ever spend their sober journey feeling ostracized and alone. If I have anything to say about it, life with no alcohol or less alcohol will no longer mean a life without fun, friends, or indulgence.

The last two years of my life were characterized by sober solitude, but I see a lot more revelry and authentic connections in my future. I'm committed to changing the narrative surrounding sober living, and I cannot wait to remember every detail.

xoxo
Bailey



**Bailey Bowerman** is a self-proclaimed recovering attorney and late bloomer. She loves words, rest, and hyping entrepreneurs and creatives. She lives in Northern Idaho with her husband and is decidedly and unapologetically NOT outdoorsy.

facebook.com/bailey.standish
instagram.com/diversion_events



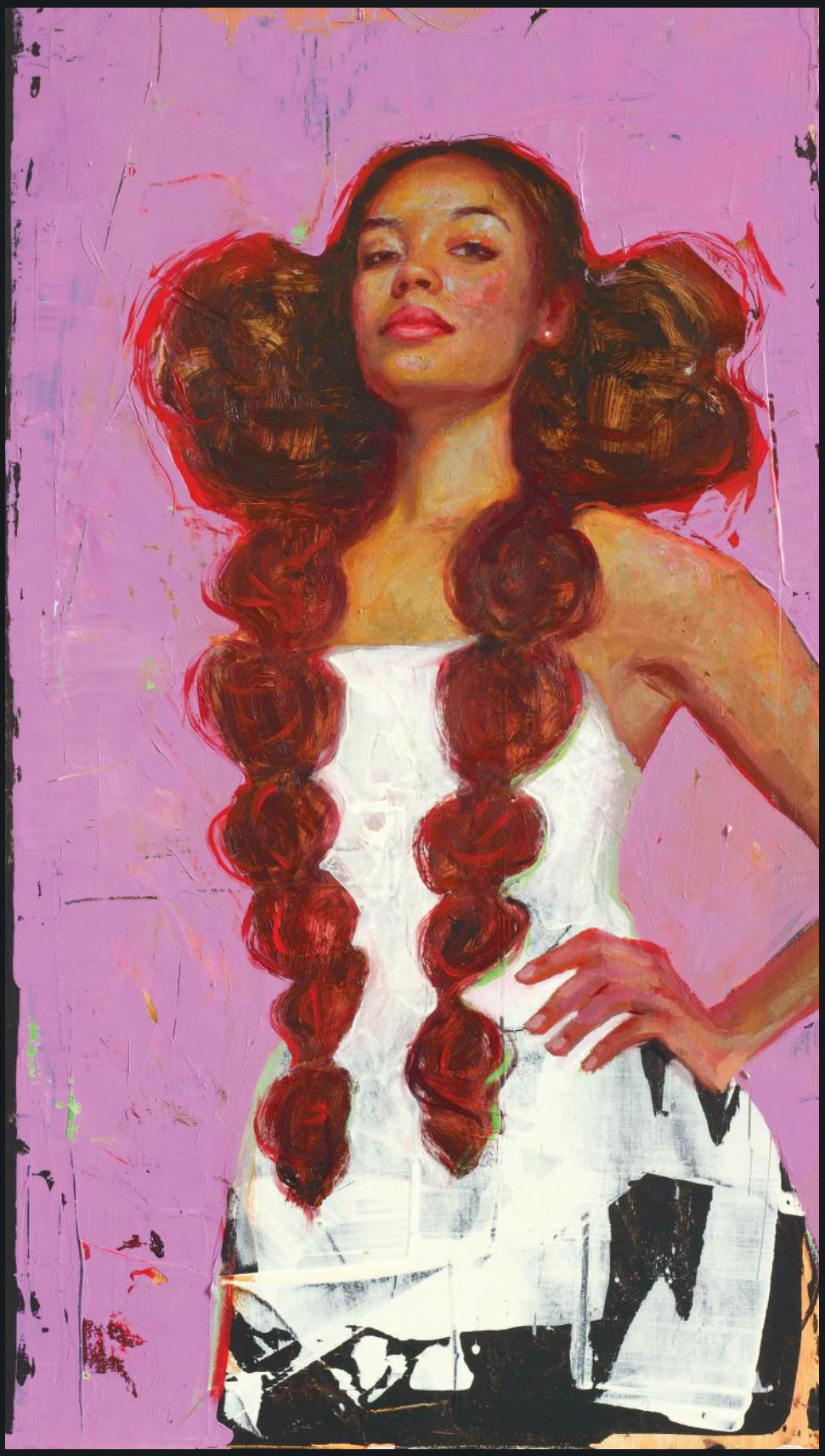

PHOTOGRAPHER **Danny Cordero**
instagram.com/dannycorderophotos



# Rosso Emerald Crimson









I am all of the women I paint.
I am the young girl who questions
the future, and the one who
bricks hers in daydreams.

I'm the woman who looks
vulnerable, and the one that
feels invincible. I'm that kid who is
tender, and the lady who is slender.

I'm the mother who gives birth,
and the one who pleases men.
I'm the beauty Queen, I'm the
woman who broke free.

I'm the woman who spreads
her wings wide, and the ones
who shelter by her side.

I'm the fighter, I'm the lover,
I'm the loser, I'm the scorer.

I am all of the women I painted,
and if one day I paint men,
I will also be them.

ARTIST **Rosso Emerald Crimson**
instagram.com/rossoartist



In her portraiture, **Rosso Emerald Crimson** renders female subjects who emerge through a haze of pastels and muted tones. She infuses the dreamy oil paintings with responses to current affairs and questions about the future, which often serve as a catalyst for her projects. The artist depicts the women and girls staring forward with unsmiling expressions. Psychologically charged, her characters capture the viewers' imagination and instill very subjective, intimate responses.

Technically, while Rosso approaches painting from a classical perspective, in her final rendering she twists her creations to achieve a feeling of contemporaneity. Often, the beautifully rendered portraits and figures seem to emerge from the remnants of intricate surfaces, as if embodying the cycle of rebirth from decadence. The artist compares her creative process to the Hegelian dialetic: somehow chaotic and contradictory in the making yet geared towards the achievement of a higher sense of harmony.

Italian born, Rosso has been living in London since early 2000. She trained at the London Atelier of Representational Art (LARA) and now works a full time artist.  She has won several art prizes, including the 2016 "Emerald Winter Pride Award", organised by Pride UK; the first prize for the Holly Bush "Emerging Woman Painter Prize", leading to Rosso's first solo exhibition at CASSart headquarters gallery in London. In 2019, Rosso was awarded the first prize for the portrait/figurative category at the "Jackson Open Painting Prize". She was selected to participate in "Sky Portrait Artist Of The Year" in 2019 and again in 2021. In 2021, she was finalist in the renown "Beautiful Bizarre Art Prize", which opened doors to collaborations and exhibitions internationally with galleries in US (Sugarlift, Principle Gallery), Canada (James Baerd Gallery), Norway (Romfjord Gallery), Germany (Stoerpunkt).

Rosso has been featured in Colossal, International Artist Magazine, Create Mag, Evolved Mag, MyModernMet, Artists&Illustrator; The Artist's Magazine, etc. Her painting "Climate Rebel" (2019) was on cover of Arena Magazine (Australia); her work was sold to renown art collectors wordlwide and exhibited at the Royal Institute of Oil Painters (ROI) at the Mall Galleries in London and MEAM (Museum Modern Art) in Barcelona.

# *Emerging grace*

MODEL **Sianna**
instagram.com/sianna.spearz

PHOTOGRAPHER **Robert Evans**
instagram.com/el_evansphotography



# present moment

*by Devonté Pearson*



**Devonté Pearson**, aka **T.S The Solution**, is an introspective Hip-Hop storyteller weaving lyrical tales that resonate with authenticity and personal depth. Originally from Long Beach, California, and raised in Kent, Washington, T.S found his creative home in the 509 (Spokane, WA). Notable for his project "Purple In Spokane," T.S has garnered attention in publications like The Spokesman Review, performed on KSPS PBS, and secured awards from regional entities like Artist Trust and Spokane Arts. Beyond his musical endeavors, he's opened a renowned recording studio, earned accolades for leadership from local non-profit Spokane Arts, and captivated audiences at surrounding colleges and mainstream events. T.S The Solution embodies a dynamic force in the Spokane arts scene, creating a vibrant narrative through his impactful storytelling & his leadership. The rapper now aims to spread his message and impact throughout the nation.

instagram.com/ts_the_solution_

**My name is Devonté Pearson. I am a father of twins, a husband to an entrepreneurial wife, a Hip-Hop artist (T.S The Solution), an Audio Engineer at my own recording facility, and a leader in my community of Spokane, Washington. I recently discovered how all of these titles have affected my abilities whether positively or negatively. With the pressure starting to show in my actions and on my face I decided to embark on a journey to heal. I needed to increase my awareness of what was happening internally.**

Music has always been my form of expression. I tend to write effortlessly during times of uncertainty, hostility, and fear. Not too long ago I started to ask the question of the century: why? Why do I seem to thrive as a writer during such times? Do I need to be in survivor mode to write my best songs? That was another sign I needed to be aware of in order to make a change. I started just writing for the hell of it. I wasn't worried about it being the best song anybody has ever heard. I just wanted to get what was on my heart out and on paper. I can yell when I record these lyrics. I can cry when I record these words. I can add effects to my vocals to emphasize the emotions I felt writing. Every part of production plays a role in my healing and expression. I still needed more answers.







I was never a big reader growing up. When the question “why” got louder in my head I started reading to find the answer. Books to me are brains. We get to read the brain of some of the greatest minds in the world. I read a book by Eckhart Tolle titled “The Power Of Now.” It helped fill in some blanks for me. I now know where a lot of the pressure I felt has been coming from. My inability to be present has caused me to live in an illusion. I used to pray for better days without being grateful for the second I currently have at the moment. Another part of me was healed by the end of that book. My consciousness stood front and center. I never felt this before. The past was no longer affecting my present. The future no longer scared me. It also did not excite me either. All I truly have is now. I am not my past. I am not my future. After that, I started reading more on epigenetics and trauma passed down through the generations. Knowledge became another part of my healing journey.

I can read and write by myself all day, but there is no need to do this alone. Through alignment I stumbled upon Anam Cara Healing Center in Downtown Spokane. Hannah Talbot, the founder, had a mediation class that my wife and I had attended back in mid 2023. Hannah later came to a concert of mine and told me if I needed to use her space for some time of event that I was welcomed with open arms. I didn’t know what I would do there at the time, but once I began this journey of healing she quickly popped into my mind as a guide. She can help me navigate the spiritual side of this journey. We meditated, we focused on affirmations, and we spoke during friendly conversations about life. The books helped with the science while Hannah helped with the spiritual and physical motions. Life was showing me all the different ways to heal, but even further life was showing me the particular ways I needed to heal.

Music, books, and mindfulness techniques have played an integral role in my healing process. Each pathway helped me deal with the different aspects of life. All of this has helped me be a better version of myself no matter my role or title. I’ve added morning gratitude time to the daily routine as well. Although I have come what feels like a long way, I know I’ve got a ways to go. I know there will be ups and downs. I know there will be days that feel like I’ve taken a step back. Though I know those times are to come, my focus is on the present moment.









MODEL **Devonté Pearson**
**aka T.S The Solution**
instagram.com/ts_the_solution_

PHOTOGRAPHER **Hara Allison**
instagram.com/hara.photography





# OFF THE CANVAS






ZASPORT



I'm that guy who, at a not-so-tender age, had a 'huh' moment in the most unremarkable of places – an office cubicle. Tap-tap-tap – the sound of my daily routine.

It was a Tuesday or Wednesday, I thought, "Why not just paint?" Not in some grand pursuit to be the next Bruegel, just... for the heck of it.

I wish I could say that was a transformative moment, with fanfares heralding my newfound, euphoric artist's journey. But no, I'm still that desk jockey, only now sometimes there's a brush in my hand. No grand visions, just me dabbling.

And you know what I discovered? The world isn't a straight, neatly-ordered staircase; it's a vast, undulating globe of endless possibilities. Earth is a globe, and there I am, embracing this truth at 32.

But in my defense, even Kandinsky, the art maestro, seemed to catch on to this truth after hitting 30 and finally picked up the brush. So, I guess I'm in pretty good company, aren't I?

*Iana Levman*

MODEL **Iana Levman**
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PHOTOGRAPHER **Oksana Kladkevich**
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*by Nicole Lynn*

## Mourning

It is 6am; I'm standing on my best friend's porch with a suitcase, puffy eyes and my cheeks streaked with the remnants of my mascara. I had pulled into her driveway just as the sun was breaking through the clouds. It was close to the time she usually woke, but a continuation of my night. It has always been this way. If I were to send her a text at this time of the morning, she would reply, "Why haven't you slept yet?"

A best friend knows you like a book. A good friend, anyway.

It took all I had to walk that long, long walk to her door and not appear like the lovesick fool I felt inside. But coming here was better than the *other thoughts* I had earlier. The thoughts that have plagued and followed me for years. The S word, too dramatic to speak about in public. Fear of ridicule, being looked at as *the crazy one*. Oh, what trauma does to a child….

I rang the doorbell, hearing Trinity's bark announcing my arrival to the entire neighborhood. A 100-pound, all black German Shepherd, Trinity couldn't help the rich baritone in her bark.

I hear footsteps. I take a calming breath and force a smile. Nicole isn't one for hugging, she's not the "there, there" kind of girl, but that's what I love about her. I gather my courage, seconds ticking by as I stand there on that familiar porch, the same one I have come to for 27 years. I need her undeniable strength.

As the door opened, my chin automatically raised an inch higher, my practiced smile a little brighter. After a good sniffing and the following licking of my face, Trinity moved aside, bringing Nicole into view. Looking at her face, I lost every bit of the composure I'd fought so hard for on the way to the door. I crumbled, my hand flying to my mouth to cover my outburst. I was far past any dignity or grace. All she said was, "Come in. Lock the →



door behind you." I instantly felt relief at her simple, direct commands.

Nicole; her name was the same as mine. Ironically, I met her the week I got married. She was to be my fill-in for a photography gig scheduled on the week of my honeymoon. We were both photographers at a place specializing in that fabulously famous cheesy Will Ferrell-type family photo. We loved photography, but hated those sessions - "Look here, mom and dad," while holding a fuzzy pickle, praying the squirming two-year-old would stop crying and bless us with a smile. Nicole and I have been friends since TLC was telling us about chasing waterfalls, and she told me about a show premiering called "Friends." Little did we know it was the start of a new era for us: an era is defined as a significant period of time.

Contrary to the theatrics I was currently displaying, I'm honestly not one for drama either. I despise all the boo-hooing and tears. The problem was, I wasn't powerful enough to stop them. They were automatic and embarrassing. I realize there's nothing inherently wrong with tears. It's okay to cry, but maybe not in line at Walmart, or at the red light where everyone can see me. Also, sometimes the tears didn't match the good amount of strength I had for my own self, but I'll get to that in a bit.

I had just separated from the man I had met at 15, when I still had braces on my teeth. I didn't know how to… be? I was lost. He played football and was big and strong. Something I saw as safety at the time. Together, we made two of the most beautiful children I could have ever hoped for. On the inside, where it counts. I did work off and on, but for the most part, I was a stay-at-home mother. I wanted to be the one who raised them, not a babysitter and a TV. But our marriage had slowly withered and died.

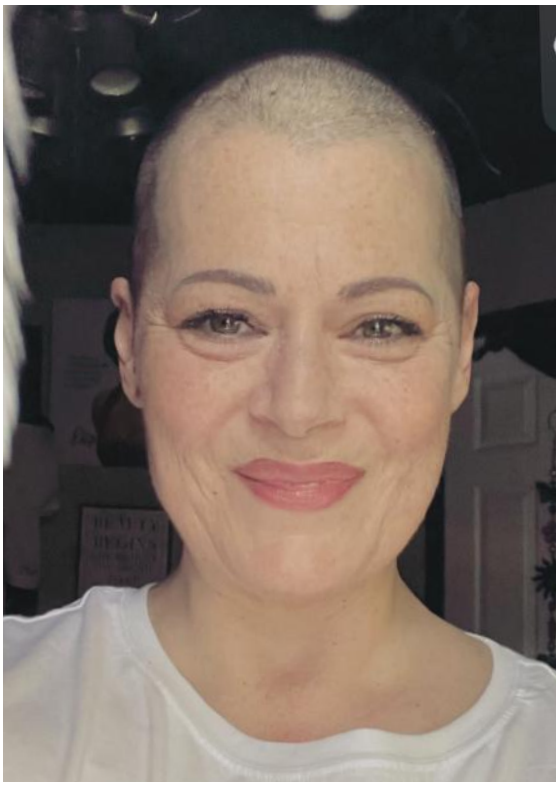
I stayed with Nicole for the next several months, trying to heal. We talked, we cried, we ate pizza, and we ate a lot of ice cream. She let me get it all out, the good, the bad, and definitely the ugly, riding with me on the roller coaster of emotions. I had always admired how she kept her emotions in check – always calm and steady – spiders aside, of course. We took turns crying. Usually, the one who wasn't went and got the ice cream that night.

Nicole had lost her father recently and was moving through her own grief. To see your friend, who rarely sheds a tear, mourn her loving father and friend - well, it does something to you. But to move through grief together bonds you forever, like sisters.

## Malformations

I had been fainting on and off since I was in high school and lived with a constant headache. I kind of thought it was normal for everyone to feel this way. Throughout the years, I had been to the ER several times seeking a diagnosis. At one point I thought I had found my answers: three herniations in my back. Yay, hallelujah! I went to physical therapy, started working out, easy-peezy. I finally reached the point where my back was good, but my workouts had become an obsession. I found the freedom of running, and I never wanted to let it go. I felt different on the treadmill. Like I was finally breathing for the first time. This was also around the time Dr. Phil taught us about what a payoff is.

Nicole and I shared the exercise addiction for years. We had babies together, we gained and lost weight together. And boy, oh boy, did we work out together. Billy Blanks nearly killed us! Or maybe it was the 3 to 4 hours working out we did AFTER his punishing workouts. I don't know. Nicole lifted weights, while I went down the cardio route. We would call each other daily swearing we had just come up with the newest way to use the total





gym to target some tiny, buried muscle as if we had split the atom. It was kind of insane. But hey, it was free, legal, not fattening, and nobody was stopping us!

A few years into this beautiful torture, the pain in my neck became so bad I couldn't hold my head up. That next MRI showed I now had four herniations in my neck. I couldn't find a payoff to justify seven spinal herniations, so I tried to slow down a bit to let my body heal. This meant only five miles a day and no weight lifting. Nicole had beautiful, strong "Rachel" arms, so it was hard for me to keep from comparing. I missed lifting, but I also had to be a mom and a wife.

Two weeks later I suffered another fainting spell – this time with a smack to the head from the windowsill I hit on the way down. Off to the ER once again. At this point, I felt as though I should have my own wing, or at least a cape to make things fun. The results: "You're good. Nothing exploded in your head. No mass. Here's a lorazepam for your obvious panic. See you later." Eight hours waiting to be seen, only to get a "diagnose and adios." Only, without the diagnose part.

It wasn't until a week had gone by that I looked at my discharge papers and saw the actual results from the CT scan. The notes read, "Chiari malformation with a 9mm brain herniation." I huffed, thinking "What in the world is that?" but refused to look it up. As if magically, this would go away if I continued to ignore it. If the doctor said I was fine, then I was fine. Only, I wasn't fine. I needed to find out why I kept fainting, and why I was so sick all of the time. Every time I bent over, I got dizzy. A migraine was my constant companion. It just became a part of life to move through pain.

When I finally attempted an internet search, I read the first paragraph with a frown. By →

the second paragraph I was throwing up. Not unusual for me, but this time it was from reading that my brain was falling out. Did I read that right? My brain is pushing through the skull and onto my spine? I mean, how could this be a real thing? But it made sense. Each paragraph I read described every symptom, every nuance of my pain for as long as I could remember: the headaches, the neck pain, the back pain that ruled my life, the brain fog – all of the odd and random aches and pains finally explained. I had always felt like I was on a 10 second delay, and it turns out, I was! My cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) flow was compromised getting to my brain. I was speechless. I found out my jugular was also compressed, and I had something called Eagles Syndrome, the malformation of a tiny bone that projects from your skull just under your ear. Face, jaw, and throat pain, all explained for the first time in my life!

## Michelle

Genetically, she's Nicole's sister, but ain't no way Michelle isn't mine too! We don't share DNA, but we share some of the same heartache, the kind that brings you to your knees. The kind where only the real tough survive. Sometimes all you have to do is look into another woman's eyes to feel the pain that matches yours.

Around three years ago, Michelle also started to exhibit some weird symptoms: faints and falls, unexplained pain, and agony, respectively. Neurological, and unrelenting. Knowing that Nicole was carrying the burden of her sister's illness, I held onto my secret. In truth, I couldn't face reality on my own, and didn't want to burden her with it, especially after Nicole hit me with the jaw-dropping news, "Michelle has ALS." I couldn't think, I couldn't breathe. I fell face-first into guilt thinking, "My diagnosis is big, but it isn't going to take my life." I was a master at this kind of self sabotage - I breathe it in, always living in guilt. Hearing what Michelle was dealing with literally took my will to live. I already struggled with depression, low self-esteem, and trauma. Michelle was the sweetest, kindest person in North America, so why this? Why was this happening to her when I was the one on that ugly fence of not wanting to be here anymore? I couldn't make sense of it.

My birthday came, and with it a flareup. I was really uncomfortable and couldn't move, so my birthday plans turned into a small celebration with the animals and Nicole . We had a nice little dinner, were watching a movie, and I was completely at ease and happy for the first time in a very long time.

Then the levee broke. Nicole got a call about Michelle, and I heard muffled screaming. She was already putting on her shoes when I came around the corner asking, "Michelle, what's wrong? Are you okay?" We were soon racing to Michelle's house. I'm not sure how I got to the car. It was all a blur. Nicole ran in, but I stayed in the car, unable to move. Not a minute later Nicole runs out, screaming in the street, "Please, someone please! Please come help my sister!" She screamed and even clapped her hands, desperate for anyone to help her. Her devastation, in its purest form, moved me from the car despite my pain. We found Michele face down in her hallway. She had been there for hours. I can't explain how helpless I felt knowing I was too weak to help. All I could do was sit, and pray my biggest prayer.

It's been three years since that night. I've since had Chiari decompression surgery, where they took a piece of my skull out to make room for my brain tonsils. I have 14 metal plates and 21 screws from the base of my skull brain down to L5 S1. Michelle is bedbound for life, frozen, motionless except for her left thumb and a little eye movement. I'm humbled

daily by her will and strength. Just being near her has taught me how to be soft, but strong. She taught me how to be brave, yet letting my fears show. She taught me I can be determined, yet let my tears flow.

My first morning after spending the night on the ridge, as we call it, I confessed to Nicole the ugly thoughts were back. She said it was selfish. I wasn't offended because she didn't know what it was to feel like as if you were putting everyone around you through a nightmare. But I did.

Today, I shake my head as I type this. I feel as if all this was a lifetime ago. Another life. Michelle has shown me what it means to appreciate life. I've gone through RIM (Regenerating Images in Memory) therapy, and have been the recipient of a whole lot of love from Michelle and Nicole. I feel as though I have already healed through discipline, so all I have to do is welcome in this newfound love for myself. It's true what they say, healing has to come from within. Until you can stand on your own, stand in the shadows that scare you, until you're not afraid anymore, you can't move forward. I was so tired of being afraid, and I drew strength from not ever wanting to be that sad and desperate again. I finally reached the point where my validation didn't hang on other people's thoughts and my smiles weren't forced.

I may not be able to run like I used to, but I believe that ability was taken away so I would finally stop and realize what is important. I still struggle, but we all do, and my foundation is strong. My power is in finding a way to stand back up. I can sit and cry and get it all out, but I have a plan on how I'm going to get back up. In 11th grade english class, I wrote something inspirational in the last line of an assignment – something I had never felt, but hoped at some point could be true: "And in the end, she was happy."

I found my true self, and learned that trauma was something that happened but doesn't define me. I am whole. I am at peace. And I am happy.

chiaribridges.org







# Timofei Rassokhin

**Timofei Rassokhin** is a photographer and psychologist. As a psychodramatist he loves visualizing and capturing vivid emotions of people. In his sessions with models and clients, he practices non-directive approach, letting them live in the moment. He feels his job is to give space and push the buttion in the right moment!

FEMALE MODEL **Elina Polukhina**
instagram.com/elina_poluhina

PHOTOGRAPHER **Timofei Rassokhin**
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MAKEUP ARTIST **Marina Karaseva**
instagram.com/psy_karaseva



**Volodina** is professional model and makeup artist with over ten years experience. She has been featured in hundreds of publications such as magazines, calendars and book covers. In her work, Volodina focuses on creativity, diversity, emotions and professionalism. Although dark aesthetic is the closest thing to her heart, she is a very open-minded person and can be seen in various, sometimes very surprising creations.

MODEL/MAKEUP ARTIST **Volodina**
instagram.com/volodina.model
facebook.com/model.volodina
volodina.portfoliobox.net

PHOTOGRAPHER **Karolina Chrapkiewicz**
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Melancholy

# OKSANA
## Kladkevich

Hello. I'm **Oksana**. When someone asks me to tell something about myself, the first thing I always feel is an inner conflict: how can I describe myself in a few words? Photographer? Musician? Mother? Film Director? A character from a book? I have been waking up with this question for seven years.

Seven years... that's how long I've been doing photography. Coincidence? Perhaps I am looking to find answers about me in other people. I am stalker, creator, observer.

My photography gives me the opportunity to tell stories about people, because every person's life is like a book. Some have bright pages and many pictures inside, while others have empty pages with only one word: conscience, goodness, love, peace. There are some forgotten and beautiful works standing on far book shelf in the dust. Some of these books will never be opened.

My photography is multifaceted in nature. It doesn't contain retouch, only the real person as he is.

Every new shooting is an improvisation and a new story. I mix different tools: prisms, music, light, liquid haze for atmosphere and besides that emotional mood, feelings and current life experience of my hero.

I call myself a transformational photographer. The shooting process begins long before the start. First, I see pictures of a person in my head and prepare some sketches. At the time of shooting, I take out these ideas and begin to create, sculpt and look deep into the universe of my hero like a stargazer. It is so beautiful, but so difficult to describe. Those who were in this process with me understand everything without words.

A person transforms before my eyes and this part I love the most. My photography is born in love. It's look like a meditation: time, space and quantum particles are working with me.

If you ask me: "Are you a photographer?" The answer will be: "Not exactly." I'm much more. I don't associate myself with this profession. I am not a photographer. I am a stalker and a creator.

And I take pictures with my heart.

MODEL/PHOTOGRAPHER **Oksana Kladkevich**
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SELF
portrait





# dirt

Dirt emerges from the exquisite fusion of two realms: the enchanting synergy between photography and music. Our model, a gifted singer-songwriter, was moved by the artistic impulse to visually encapsulate the essence of her lyrical composition. The narrative unfolds with poignant eloquence, portraying the tragic journey of a young woman attempting to liberate herself from the suffocating clutches of a toxic relationship. Each image delicately captures pivotal moments – the quest for an elusive escape, the sobering realization of entrapment, culminating in the evocative depiction of a soul inexorably succumbing to the depths of emotional submersion.















WARDROBE STYLIST/MODEL/MAKEUP ARTIST
**Martina Stella La Vista**
instagram.com/zkdixon

PHOTOGRAPHER **Paolo Del Rocino**
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I am a passionate and dedicated portrait, beauty and fashion photographer, driven by the art of capturing beauty and telling stories through my lens. With a background in photography and a keen eye for detail, I strive to create visually compelling and evocative images that resonate with viewers. I really love to connect with my subjects and go beyond the shooting itself to find human feelings and interactions. This is, I think, my main flavour as a photographer.
*Paolo Del Rocino*

# Journey TO THE next step

*by Kristi Leavitt*



**Kristi Leavitt** has spent the majority of her career in advertising but has found a new road to travel and is now a sales leader at an independent living retirement community in Spokane, WA. She has lived in the Spokane and Coeur d'Alene area all her life. She and her husband Ken have blended family of seven adult children and one grandchild. When not at work helping seniors and their families find solutions, you can find Kristi playing with her pups while baking them treats and settling into life as a recent empty nester..

**There are so many things that we don't see coming when we are younger. We think everything is within our control, when in reality, life is a river that carries us where it may. This is the river that led me to Senior Living.**

Advertising was my primary career path, with a brief diversion into Supplemental Insurance. Every bit as exciting and stimulating as it sounds, this foray into insurance illuminated my desire to help people in their time of need. I eventually returned to the advertising field, finding had evolved into a younger person's game, and I no longer had that on my side. It also didn't leave me with a deep sense of purpose that my insurance work had.

Then came COVID. The world seemed to shut down and my career path shut down with it. Between caring for my elderly mother, who was living with us, and a husband with his own health issues, I was terrified to work outside the home, risking bringing home what, at that point and time, was deemed a death sentence. We holed up, hunkered down and hid from the world, as many people did. We… okay, mostly the kids, used the time to remodel a house so that we could sell it and buy a house that was more suitable for my elderly mother.

My mother. That's where the real story begins. As my sister and I grew up, she was always available and in-tune. As adults she transformed into a loving, supportive friend and mentor and the kind of grandmother that Hallmark writes cards about. I have been lucky indeed. Even as adults, the loss of a parent is still heart-wrenching and leaves a hole that cannot

be filled. The family dynamic shifts to the next generation who needs to step up and lead the family, ready or not. While I have yet to lose my mother to death, she, our relationship and our family transformed on February 2, 2014.

*"Your mom has had a stroke" she said, eyes full of sympathy. She squeezed my hand and took me in to see my mom. At the first sight of her, I almost crumbled. She looked so small in the hospital bed...*

Seahawks fans may remember this as day the Legion of Boom crushed the Denver Broncos with a score of 43 to 8 during Super Bowl XLVIII. Mom was supposed to come watch the game with us, but got a last minute invitation to view it with friends. When she called to let me know the change of plans, she mentioned that her cat had been hissing at her all morning. The cat knew what was coming. The rest of us were clueless.

Within 5 minutes of the games end, my phone rang. I was surprised to hear a man's voice telling me that my mother was on her way to the hospital. I thought it was a joke at first, an attempt to kill my post-game victory buzz, but it quickly became apparent this was all too serious.

It had snowed heavily that day. We bundled up and made the very slippery drive to the hospital. We were greeted by a neurologist, still in her full Seahawks gear complete with green hair. "Your mom has had a stroke" she said, eyes full of sympathy. She squeezed my hand and took me in to see my mom. At the first sight of her, I almost crumbled. She looked so small in the hospital bed, left side of her face drooping, confusion as to why she could not use her left arm and hand, or articulate the words that were in her head. She was caught in an unfamiliar universe with no one who could pull her back though to the world she knew.

The next months was a blur. I alternated my lunch hours so I could address her needs. One day I'd go to the rehab facility to visit with her and pick up her laundry. The next day I would visit to her condo to take care of her cat, now referred to as "The Stroke Whisperer". This routine was the norm until the day l I was informed that her time in rehab had run out and that they would be releasing her. Wait. WHAT? She had barely progressed to the point that she could feed herself, much less bathe, dress, cook, clean or get herself to and from the restroom. I naively asked where she was going, thinking there was a plan for a continuum of care. I received back a slight shrug and "That's up to the family."

I was fully hit by the enormity of the situation. Cats and laundry had now become the honeymoon period to this new phase in our lives. Our only options at this point were to bring her home with us or take her back to her condo. Our immediate thought was bringing Mom to our house wasn't an option. There were stairs upon stairs and no way to get her into the main living area. With my husband and I working full time jobs, and all the kids in school, this would leave her alone during the day, which was about as feasible as leaving an infant alone for a nine-hour stretch.

Taking her back to the condo was equally fraught with peril. Who would take care of her? How would she get to doctor's appointments and shop and cook and clean? There was only one answer to each of those →

questions: “Me.” Mom was fortunate enough to have a neighbor willing come and check on her every two hours during the workdays, but nights and weekends were on me. I’d do the shopping and cook meals that the neighbor could pop in the microwave for lunch. I’d stop by in the morning to make her breakfast, get her dressed and get her settled into an easy chair for the day. After work I’d go back, give her a shower, feed her supper, get her into pajamas and settled into bed for the night before going home to do a rinse and repeat with my own kids. Mom was appreciative but did not have the cognitive ability to recognize the toll it was taking on me.

It all came to a head 8 months post-stroke. It was a Saturday and I had finished giving her a shower and wrapped up breakfast. I let her know that I was going to head to the store to get groceries for the week and she announced she wanted to go to the store with me. While this sounded liked a move in the right direction, the reality of it was quite different. It took 15 minutes just get her from the condo to my car using her walker. It was unseasonably warm that day and by the time I managed to get her into the car, buckled up, walker folded and put in the trunk, I was a sweaty and cranky mess. The grocery store was less than a mile away, so before I had a chance to cool down we had to do it all in reverse. Fortunately, the grocery store had a motorized scooter available, so we got her one and decided to split up the shopping tasks. I commandeered the shopping list and asked her to go pick a few frozen entrees for herself while I shopped a few aisles over from where she was.

I kept hearing an odd sound. A slapping and skidding noise but my exhaustion kept me from really processing it further until I headed back to the frozen food aisle. As I rounded the corner, I was just in time to see the source of the sound. Mom was holding the freezer door open with one hand, and was batting boxes of frozen meals to the floor with the other. There were 10 of them, lying in the aisle like items at a yard sale, her face beaming with a look of accomplishment. I, on the other hand, was mortified. Store employees were gathered and gawking, not quite sure of what they were witnessing. I apologized profusely and picked up the wayward meals and got out of there as fast as one can with someone in mom’s condition. By the time I got her to the car, buckled in and walker stowed, the dam broke. I no longer had to ability to rationalize, sympathize, or empathize. Eight months of stress came spewing forth and didn’t stop for a half hour. Ugly crying and hyperventilating, the grocery store staff now had a new source of entertainment: the crazy lady crying in her car with the frozen food assailant looking on in shock.

An hour later we had returned to her condo, with me feeling like there was not a single ounce of water left in my body between the crying and sweating. I got the food prepped and managed to squeak out an “I’m sorry” as I left that day. The next morning, Mom was waiting for me in the living room. I was proud she’d managed

*Ugly crying and hyperventilating, the grocery store staff now had a new source of entertainment: the crazy lady crying in her car with the frozen food assailant looking on in shock.*

to get herself out there but stopped when I saw her face. I could tell she'd been crying and assumed she was upset by my meltdown. As I started to apologize, she stopped me. She told me how sorry she was that all of this had fallen on me and that we needed to come up with a different plan. It had finally sunk in that this was not a sustainable situation for either of us.

We decided to try having in-home health care come in to do the heavy lifting for me. The 4-hour blocks of time we booked a few times a week resulted in a half hour for a shower, and 3.5 hours of visiting with my mom. The bills were mounting, and I was still the person who performed the bulk of the daily chores. Mom was also having trouble at night. She was trying to be more independent, but her body was not ready. That is when the falls began. The first time, I found her on the floor, wedged between the wall and her bed. Afraid of hurting her and having no idea how long she'd been there, I called 911. When the next fall came, she hit the floor so hard the neighbor heard it, and they called 911. By the third time the paramedics came out, they advised me that she was no longer safe to remain in her home and that we needed to come to a decision on a NEXT "next step." The problem was, I had no idea what the next step was.

Understandably, Mom had always been adamant about never being put in a *home*. Too many episodes of The Golden Girls and the numerous references to "Shady Acres," combined with images of the Retirement Communities from her parent's era swam in her head. They swam in mine as well. I have a very vivid memory of a choir performance at a nursing Home when I was 8 years-old and I remember being sad and scared and just wanting to get out of there as fast as I could.

My kids were little at the time and attended a daycare right behind two Retirement Communities, so that is where I decided to begin my search. I knew enough about Mom's finances to have a ballpark estimate of what she could afford. I called the first place and had to keep myself from audibly gasping when I heard their beginning pricing of a studio apartment. With sticker shock and my fingers shaking, I dialed the phone to the other independent living community. To my relief, they had pricing that fell into mom's price range and some 3rd party care options available. We booked a visit for the following Saturday.

Incredibly reluctant, Mom tried backing out three times that week, so when Saturday arrived, I loaded the kids into the car to come with us because they could convince their Grandma to do things she wouldn't do for me. Yes, I stacked the deck a little that day. When we arrived at the community, Mom was apprehensive, but I could also see her curiosity was piqued. We entered through the main entrance, Mom with her walker, me and the kids trailing behind like little ducks. The Community Sales Leader read the last 8 months on my face and scooped Mom, taking her under her wing to show off the amenities. For the first time in 8 months, I had a feeling of peace and was teetering on the edge of hope. Even though Mom did not say much, I had a feeing of being lighter when we left there that day. I left Mom at her condo to marinate in the experience overnight, and called the next morning to ask if she'd like me to set up more tours to other communities. You could have knocked me over with a feather when she said she wanted to go back and secure the apartment we had looked at.

Mom was there for 4 glorious years. She ingratiated herself to staff and residents alike and was in her *social butterfly* element. I cannot count the number of times I had to call the front desk because she wasn't answering her phone only to be told she was playing a game or on an outing with her friends. She


Janet Feldhausen



dined on prime rib at Christmas and danced the night away (until 9:00) on New Year's Eve. She went from walker to wheelchair, and battled cancer there. She lived a lot of life in that community, and found a whole new purpose. While she never wanted to be put in a *home*, home is indeed what she found there.

COVID hit and like the rest of the world, life as we knew it turned on its ear. The community did an excellent job of navigating the new normal, but between Mom's care needs increasing, and our own fears of her getting exposed to COVID, we decided to move her in with us. The kids were grown, my husband was home all day and there was a feeling of *this is what good children do for their parents*. Year one went well in the new house. Mom could navigate the entire first floor and even get out on to the porch if she wanted to. Year two, we noticed her spending a lot more time in her room, binge watching Little House on the Prairie. Her sight and mobility continued to decline, and she needed care that was harder for us to address and navigate. It was apparent that she needed and deserved better care than we could give.

After a year of navigating the Medicaid application, Mom was finally approved, and we moved her into an adult family home. While different from an independent living community, this home was just what Mom needed to have a renewed feeling of independence and vigor. In addition to all the care she needs by people qualified and passionate about providing it, she's got peers to talk to and adores the staff there.

In the end, this journey brought Mom to a place where her physical and emotional needs are met. She has flourished there, as she once did at her independent living community. It also brought me to a deeply rewarding career in senior living as a Community Sales Manager. On a daily basis, I not only get to help others who are standing where I once was, but I get to help seniors find that *next step*, and share in the rewards that come with it.

If you find yourself on this journey in the Spokane area, do not despair. Our area has so many great options with people who are passionate about the senior population. With its independent living, assisted living, skilled nursing, memory care and Hospice resources, Spokane and North Idaho have a network of communities that fill the needs of our aging population professionally and gracefully. Take the time to objectively and honestly look at the situation and decide what supportive services are the priority in your search. Then, take the very important first step towards your *next step*. That's where it all begins. ▮



MODEL/PERFORMER **Laden**
instagram.com/smoothvsladen

WARDROBE STYLIST/CREATIVE DIRECTOR/PHOTOGRAPHER **Special K**
instagram.com/developfrom_thenegatives

# Smooth the Scientist

**Sky Stitched Designs** is committed to fashion inclusivity and accessibility. The brand is for those who like innovative designs that bring anime inspirations to reality. Becoming a Sky Stitched Doll is not just a title, it's a lifestyle! Professionalism, Uniqueness, Sexy, Sweet, and a "YES" mindset when it comes to fashion accessibility!

Crocheting for me is really just a creative outlet where I get to express myself. I want others to be able to look and feel their best in crochet pieces I design.

FASHION DESIGNER **Sky Stitched Designs**
instagram.com/skystitcheddesigns

# BUILT WITH MANY HANDS

*by Elin Adcock*



## My life has been filled with projects. There's just nothing more satisfying to me as a project completed.

I learned to crochet at nine, took up acrylic paints at eleven, learned felting and how to make Christmas ornaments out of glittery paper and straw, learned how to make a marionette, and a hundred other crafts as a Girl Scout. I was the sister who always put the cereal toys together – you know, the snap-together plastic things that were an entire journey of their own. First, you had to convince mom to buy the cereal, and then you had to hunt for the toy floating around in the box (we didn't wait until we got to it by actually EATING the cereal), and finally, had to break apart all those tiny pieces without losing them, and figure out how they snapped together from those cryptic instructions that would give IKEA a run for their money.

I learned how to install my own telephone at 15, after my parents told me, "No, you can't have a phone in your room, that costs money that we don't have!" Thus, ushering in the era of "just watch me" when faced with an obstacle of someone else's making. My first marriage was filled with arguments where I was told "you can't do that", "that won't work", "that won't fit there", "you don't need to do that" and a hundred other reasons why I shouldn't be taking on the project of the week. It seems, looking back, the first part of my life was filled with people telling me what I HAD to do, instead of encouraging me to do what I WANTED to do, which led to a pretty big chip on my shoulder, in addition to a pretty strong sense of self-assuredness, and that I COULD, INDEED, DO THAT.

I spent my thirties raising my kids, doing the work thing, trying to build a life for us that matched the vision I had in my head of what I wanted our lives to look like. My ideas and ambitions never resonated within our marriage. That was a very lonely time in my life - projects lost their shine and I put my head down and gritted my teeth through the chore that was our relationship.

It wasn't until after I remarried, having reconnected with my very best childhood friend, my first "boyfriend" who came back into my life just as my first marriage was ending, that I finally learned the power of what WE can do together, rather than what I can do. Those first few years he spent working on that chip on my shoulder, gentling me in the way one would do a stubborn horse, encouraging me not only to chase my dreams, but joining me in the pursuit, helping me to improve my terribly stunted life skills and allowing me the space to grow into the person I was meant to be. All the while, he lent his energy to mine, and we spent every day striving towards our shared dreams. Two being infinitely greater than one, we prospered.

Then I got my first Volkswagen. Rather, I was gifted my first Volkswagen by my father-in-law, who was just so tickled that his son and I had finally gotten together after all those years apart. He'd long held this vision that one of his boys would marry one of the Pearson girls, and it finally happened. So, after casually asking me what my dream car was, he bought it for me, and towed it from Florida to Texas to deliver it personally. A red, convertible, 1974 Karmann Ghia became the major catalyst for change in my life from the "I" to the "We."

I drove that derelict car around with a smile, despite its breaking down every so often, needing a replacement coil, a fuel pump, some gas, the list of mishaps and failures went on and on and on. Each rescue came at the →

hands of one of the members of our growing VW community, complete strangers coming together to help us as many times as we came to rescue them. We traded parts, time and stories as we all labored together, building our cars and furthering our dreams collectively. VW Work Days became a regular occurrence, where members would come together to work on whatever project was needed – a brake job, a tune-up, some upholstery work – all of us learning together how to care for and restore our precious relics. Family events were celebrated, tragedies were grieved, and we all did it together, in community. Our Work Days were almost like a good, old fashioned barn-raising – every person in attendance had a purpose, whether it was to help, or to learn, to be comedic relief or wisdom. There were those who were there to cook, and some who would "hold my coffee" (yes, that was a thing) when I needed to put my tiny girl hands into a space that the guys could not. So many strong hands to lift an engine, stretch upholstery, or break a bolt loose, so many smaller, softer hands to sand bodywork, or put things together but not break them. It was during those years that I learned joy can't be bought, but it can be built with many hands.

It was also during that time I learned to embrace *problems* as opportunities. Each leaking brake line was a chance to learn more about how these cars were built, each late-night rescue mission in the cold and the rain, a chance to grow closer to the people in our lives, each cruise or campout filled with stories we will always remember. If we broke it, we'd fix it, when we fixed it, we could drive it, and when we drove it, we felt this immense satisfaction of knowing that we had done it together.

It is that very life lesson that has become a lifeline to me, at a time when I most need support and assistance – this time not with a car, but during my grief from losing my dear husband. It is that very same community who have embraced our family, this time not to fix, but certainly to support and love us through a time that we just can't get through alone. They know from our experience with these old cars that sometimes there is no fixing, sometimes there is only reflection, and memories. Sometimes, the only thing to be done with that dented hubcap is to paint it and turn it into something it was never meant to be. That exploded piston can be welded into a piece of art that lets you know what it was, but can never be again. And it is like that with this grief. There is no fixing, there can be only transmutation. There can be only time, and shared memories. There is no way on earth that *I* can survive the pain of his loss, but certainly *we* can make it through this, together. It will be only because of those many hands that I will come out on the other side of this grief journey. Perhaps with many dents, squeaks, rusty parts and parts that give out, but still drivable, and hopefully, one day filled with the simple satisfaction of a project completed. ▮



Ordinarily a very self-assured person, **Elin Adcock** has spent the better part of her life focused on family, career and her vintage VW obsession – pretty much in that order. In recent years, she has added some backyard chickens, a flock of cockatiels and garden beds to her list of hobbies. With retirement age looming, this newly-widowed woman is on a journey of self-discovery, one that is causing her to re-evaluate her life as it was, and how it will be in the coming years. Her devoted sons, sisters, nieces and nephews are now front and center in her life, lifting her spirits and acting as her true north. It is their support, as well as her editorial efforts for this magazine and advocacy for the ALS and FTD communities that has allowed her to move forward with purpose through this difficult time. You can find more of her original works at *The Write Stuff*, a blog page hosted by several ALS patients and caregivers.

alsthewritestuff.com/blog




CRITERION



MODEL **Mariah Scroggins**
instagram.com/whatta_peach

KODAK PORTA 800




# brenda cook

**Brenda Cook** is an award-winning and Internationally published photographer in the Inland Northwest.

An Idaho native, her love of photography started at the young age of 10 when she received her first Kodak 110 film camera.

Since that time, she has enjoyed displaying her art in galleries, selling prints, and serving the community as a portrait photographer.

She has been voted "Best Photographer of North Idaho" three years running (2021-2023).

She enjoys the creative aspects of her conceptual art and fantasy photography the most, and has a passion for capturing and revealing the beauty in nature and in all people.

She visualizes her subjects as works of art. "Art is my life and my life is art."

Brenda's published works can be seen in a variety of magazine features ranging from fantasy and pinup to travel and nature.

She specializes in senior, wedding, couples, boudoir, fantasy and family photography, as well as travel and nature photography.

PHOTOGRAPHER **Brenda Cook**
instagram.com/bcookphoto



MODEL **Amy Sherman**
instagram.com/mamamy2.0




MODEL **Amy Sherman**
instagram.com/mamamy2.0




MODEL **Cierra Swan**
instagram.com/c.joella.95



MODEL **Elle Sinclair**
instagram.com/elle.sclair

# BEYOND PINK

*by Elin Adcock*

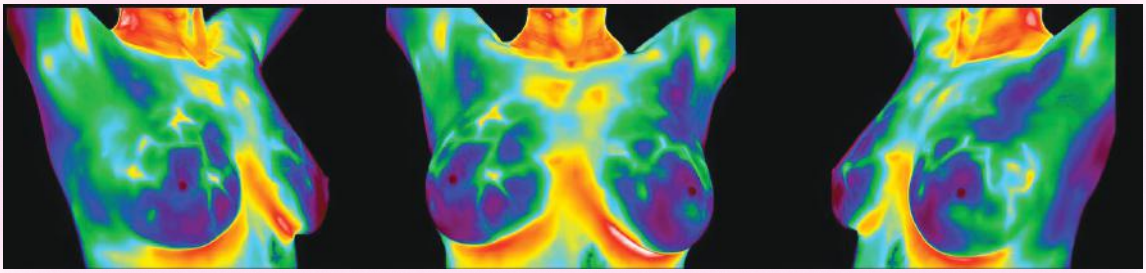


**Charlie Brewer is a force of nature. Some of the first things you notice are her bright skin, sparkling eyes, and a personality to match. The first two things she attributes to her healthy lifestyle, and the last to her strong faith.**

Her professional background of more than 30 years was anchored in the financial industry, but Charlie's primary focus now is the work she does with Beyond Pink, a Spokane-based 501c3 organization, whose mission is to improve lives in the community by providing education about, funding for, and access to, advanced breast screening technologies - specifically, thermography.

One reason Charlie is so passionate about women's health is because she herself has suffered from the chronic autoimmune disease, Lupus, for many years. Although she doesn't let the disease define her, it has certainly shaped the way she has lived her life and has fueled her desire to improve her community. Fifteen years in the past, the original diagnosis came after a time of great loss in her life. Three months before, Charlie lost her father, and almost simultaneously her mother was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer, both happening a few years after tragically losing her youngest sister. Her doctors speculated that the stress from all those losses may have been what triggered the disease process in her body.

The diagnosis led Charlie on a journey towards personal health and wellness. Researching all she could about nutrition and exercise, Charlie began reading labels, studying vitamins and nutrients, and making sure what she was putting in her body was natural and good for her. An admitted supplement junkie, she is always looking for the cleanest nutrients to use in her daily



beyondpink.net

health regimen. Beyond Pink's mission fits perfectly with her passionate pursuit of health and wellness for herself, because, as Charlie likes to say, "Supporting others is a great way to process your own pain and move forward."

Charlie and her good friend, Karla Watkins, founded Beyond Pink in 2010, to make the technology of thermography and its powerful ability to aid in the early detection of breast disease more accessible to the women in their community. This organization serves an important need, as thermography is generally not covered by insurance, but in many cases the early detection it provides is lifesaving. Beyond Pink has helped to fund thousands of thermographs through grants and financial assistance, with 1.8 million dollars raised to date. Donated funds stay local and 100% of net proceeds are used to provide grants to women in Spokane and surrounding communities.

For years, mammograms have been the go-to for breast cancer screening. The downside to a mammogram is, it takes time for a tumor to grow large enough to be detected. On the other hand, Thermography uses a digital infrared thermal camera to detect and record the infrared heat radiating from the surface of the body. Clusters of abnormal or diseased cells that can develop into cancer often have an increased blood supply that leads to an elevation in the temperature of the skin over the area. This potential indicator of abnormal breast physiology can aid in the detection of changes in the breast tissue at the earliest stage, which could be years before a mass is formed. Studies worldwide have highlighted thermography's role in early detection and monitoring of abnormal breast physiology.

Until health insurance companies begin to cover thermography, Beyond Pink will continue to bridge the gap and empower women to make informed choices for their breast health, regardless of financial standing. As for her, Charlie will continue to serve her community, asserting that if you are well, it's because you are supposed to help those who aren't. Asked about her favorite quotes, she immediately jumped to the wisdom of the great Nelson Mandela, who once said: "It is in your hands to create a better world for all who live in it." Charlie believes it, and lives it, every day.

**Charlie Brewer** spent her childhood on a family farm in Valleyford, WA, and is the middle child in a blended family of 12. As a lifelong resident of Spokane, she has a passion for the community, having served on multiple boards, and volunteered for many community outreach programs. She was also a member of "Healing Spokane" where she worked directly with medical practitioners who have a common goal to bridge the gap between conventional and complementary medicine, to provide patients the best care possible. Charlie lives in Spokane with her husband and loves spending time with her 2 kids and 5 wonderful grandboys.



# On my way

The girl with no name, she spurns social media but some photographers call her Cris.

Born on the beautiful Italian island of Sardinia, between clear waters and hills.

She travels everywhere: to Colombia, to Rome, even to Africa.

She lives among different peoples; she learns to adapt.

She speaks very little, but she observes a lot.

She lives a rebellious adolescence.

In the summer of 2011 Cris passes the exam and enrols at the University.

She becomes a nurse, and gives birth to a boy.

People tell her she can't work with a baby, she can't be a model, she can't fulfill her dreams.

But this Mum is rebellious, she has seen so much, and she is hiding an inner strength that nobody can see.

Before long, Cris begins working as a nurse.

When the pandemic begins, she cannot put into words how much suff ering her eyes have seen.

But she can tell the world through photography.

She can convey her energy with poses and looks. She can be herself, she can tell her story through the lens of a camera.

She can be herself: She can be Cris.

*by Ted O'Neill, reporter, The Lincolnshire Echo.*

MODEL **Cristiana Tosi**
facebook.com/cristiana.tosi.5






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PHOTOGRAPHER **Tatyana Loshagina**
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MAKEUP ARTIST **Vasiliy Skobelin**
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MODEL **Mariya Veber**
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MODEL **Yuliya Gorbovets** @Modelstars - Ekb Age
instagram.com/yuliagorbovets



MODEL **Makenzie Miller**
instagram.com/mackythemonster




PHOTOGRAPHER **Paul Romanov**
instagram.com/rosepaintedblk

**Paul Romanov** is a photographer at Rose Painted Black Photography in Spokane, WA. He was born in Russia, but raised in Southern California by adoptive parents. He picked up photography in 2016 when he got my first DSLR camera as a Christmas present and has been doing it ever since. He graduated with his associates degree in fine arts in 2019 and has been focusing on growing his business and audience. He's photographed everything from portraits to weddings, to a brand deal with Aqua Haus Co. based in Texas. The most fun part to Paul is that, because art is subjective, he can have boundaries outside the box and a sense of creativity that he can't have in other fields. Picking up his Canon Rebel T6 brings an enjoyment that he can't find anywhere else.



# Gabriel Toapanta







**Gabriel Toapanta**, Ecuadorian artist, is 29 years old. He loves photography: the concepts and emotions that you can capture through an image. Where others see simplicity he sees beauty. Through photography, he has met makeup artists and designers who inspire his photographic work. Each photo tells a story, using different styles of composition, colors, editing and artistic makeup to provide a unique touch. Gabriel hopes people like his work and that he can transmit his emotions into their hearts

MODEL **Gabriel Toapanta**
instagram.com/gabriel.toapanta.58

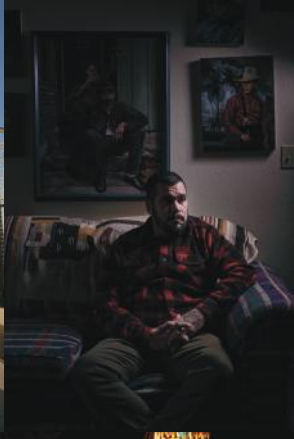
PHOTOGRAPHER **Steven Paucar**
instagram.com/steeven_paucar

PHOTOGRAPHER **Esteban Pacheco**
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