



We Are Family

marianne drenthe

By Caresse Muir

Marianne Drenthe, a nurse who specialized in caring for the critically ill, pinpoints the exact turning point in her life that led her to a career in photography. After nearly losing her second child during the birth process in a life-saving surgery that required 20 units of blood, Marianne re-examined her life goals. She always wanted to express her creativity, so a few years after the tumultuous birth of her second child, Marmalade Photography was born in Wilmington, IL. Marmalade—a combination of Marianne’s name and those of her husband and two daughters—symbolizes family to her. Marianne shares, “Marmalade Photography represents the best of what I am for my clients and also my pride in being part of the photo industry.”

Marianne grew up in Joliet, IL, not far from Chicago. Her parents emigrated from Poland with their four children (the youngest was 17), not knowing that Marianne would be born eight months later. Since her siblings were significantly older than Marianne, she essentially grew up as an only child. She remembers always being creative, but she chose to become a nurse, only to drift back to photography years later.

Marianne experimented with film for years

having used a Canon film SLR since the early 90s then photographing her children in natural light, processing numerous rolls of black-and-white film. In 2003, she purchased her first digital camera and continued to learn how to photograph by documenting nature, experimenting with macro photography and doing a lot of environmental work. Soon after opening Marmalade Photography in 2005, she attended Jeff and Julia Woods' first photo workshop at their studio in central Illinois. At the workshop, she learned invaluable business techniques and realized she needed to polish her photography and Photoshop skills.

She logged in many hours behind the lens and in front of her computer to hone her skills at home before she felt ready to open her own studio. In early 2007, Marianne opened her downtown storefront studio with a focus on fine art children and family portrait photography. The majority of her clients travel from Chicago or nearby suburbs to her studio, but some even travel from out of state.

The unusual outdoor settings around her studio provide Marianne with all the storytelling elements that she loves to incorporate into her images. Whether she's photographing a two-year-old against a picket fence with peeling paint, a family in an old alley or a tot sitting on a velvet chair in a field, she provides each of her clients



with a completely unique set of images. "I don't ever want to get too comfortable with locations, where things become routine. I love the challenge of new locations and

have long ago discovered that a location is a sum of its parts. Photographers sometimes forget that a location isn't the whole park. Truth be told, all we need is an 8- to 10-square-foot section to shoot in and create our subject's story." When she drives around town, Marianne is always scouting new locations and noting where she wants to take clients next.

Marianne likens her photography style to a Diane Arbus quote: "I really believe there are things nobody would see if I didn't photograph them." Marianne comments, "My work is inviting, hopefully, it's also evocative and tells a story. Ultimately, the goal in my work is to elicit emotion, be it wonderment, joy, silliness, happiness, solitude. I think because I shoot for feeling rather than just for a scene, perhaps that makes my vision of the world and thus my photography different." She adds, "Ultimately though, there isn't much in my client portfolios that I look back on and am not proud of. In fact one of my favorite client images of all time was at the earliest stage of my professional career and I am still very proud of that moment captured."



It's clear that both Marianne and her clients have a blast in their sessions together by the wall in her studio she's dedicated to handwritten notes from her clients. "It is my favorite spot in my studio. Moms and dads often write me beautiful notes of thanks. Even their children can't wait to come back and visit with 'Mrs. Marianne.'" She continues, "The most important thing I do as a photographer is provide a safe, fun environment where families can enjoy themselves and create memories that will last a lifetime. My clients travel to me for photographs, but

Marianne's Favorite Products

For her finished products, her labs of choice are Burrell Pro Lab and White House Custom Colour. "Their finishes are bar none, and they are competitively priced. By using two labs, I am able to offer a wider range of products, which my clients love. I especially love Burrell's bevel-mount products and through the years I have sort of created my own product line based on several bevel-mount pieces, as well as their canvas wraps." She offers traditionally sprayed lacquered prints as well as metallic prints.

She sells boxed sets of images and albums from AsukaBooks and Finao. Many of her clients purchase a full gallery wall, which includes at least one 16x20 or larger portrait. She sells her images online and by phone. Marianne says, "My collection pricing includes full gallery walls and it helps me almost always sell 16x20s or larger at 75 percent of my sales. Because I show online and do phone ordering, I think that's pretty impressive. Part of an upsell for me is allowing albums of 15 or 30 images to sell at a discount after a sales minimum is met (about \$900). It often helps increase my bottom line and allows the client to purchase a full story of our session. This is one of my best sellers, often increasing my sales by close to \$600 (normally the 30-image proof album would sell for about \$900). I need to keep a low cost-of-goods for the product so that I can keep the value high for this option so I use J. Lee albums with interleaves for my 30-image option. My clients appreciate the albums. I love J. Lee's customer service and reliability. It's one of my tricks to keeping my cost-of-goods low while still offering a wonderful product for my clients."



I think they walk away with a much more enjoyable experience, unlike any other photography experience they've ever had. I am very proud of what my business creates for these families."

Marianne is a firm believer in belonging to professional organizations like WPPI and has attended the Las Vegas convention to gain valuable insights and education. Marianne says, "As we all know our lack of licensure requirements in photography can bring some lackluster 'professional' photographers to the mix. Organizations like WPPI exist to show that quality photography and photographers are essential

for the continued growth of our industry. WPPI brings a great deal of value to the photographer. The convention, educational seminars and the trade show are among the best of the best. Having WPPI around in the industry is essential for the continued level of excellence and standards for professional photographers."

Continuing her passion for photography, Marianne studies photographers she admires. She is particularly inspired by photographers who have their own unique "signature style and images." She respects photographers who are goal-oriented, who know themselves and their brand. Even



ALL PHOTOGRAPHS COPYRIGHT © MARIANNE DRENTHE

though Marianne doesn't photograph weddings, wedding photographers influence her. She says, "I love images that feel breathless, timeless, have movement, evoke a feeling in me. Today's wedding photography is the finest example of this." Early in her career she was inspired by the work of wedding photographer David Beckstead because she loved the mood and feel of his images. "His work feels liquid to me and

he is such a great teacher and inspiration for other photographers." Another favorite photographer of Marianne is Julia Bailey of New Orleans. She says of Julia, "She has an amazing eye, incredible vision. I love her work. Julia has true vision. She is an artist to the nth degree."

Marianne's zest for life continually inspires her photography. "The settings I choose to shoot in inspire me. Every magazine I've ever read, image I've ever seen, painting I've ever gazed upon, all of it is stored in my head and I have no idea how I come to be inspired. I shoot from the heart. It's very intuitive for me."

And her advice to new photographers reflects her style—full of emotion, passion, and a dash of humor: "Live your photographic life with focus on the good. Be passionate. Learn all you can about the technicalities, as that learning will carry over for the life of your career. Know who you are; don't eschew whom you are in order to make a buck. Charge what you are worth and not what you think they'll pay. Never underestimate your worth. Don't ever take your clients for granted. Play nice with others. Oh, and never run with scissors."

To see more of Marianne's work visit www.marmaladephotography.com.



Caresse Muir is a Certified Professional Photographer and a Master Photographer. She specializes in family, high school senior and children's portraits. She is a member of the Professional Photographers of America, Wedding and Portrait Photographers International, the Professional Photographers of California and the Professional Photographers of San Diego County, where she served as president for two years. She has won awards for her photography on the national, state and local level.

Marianne's Camera Bag

Her main camera is a Canon EOS-1Ds Mark II with a Canon 5D as her backup. She loves her 50mm f/1.2L and her 85mm f/1.2L lenses and often takes advantage of their shallow depth of field. She also utilizes the 24–70mm f/2.8L for wider shots and keeps her 16–35mm f/2.8L handy as well as a 135mm f/2.0L for more creative shoots. She stashes her lenses in her Shootsac to keep them handy just in case. Since she often shoots in cramped spaces in old downtown by her studio, she uses her 50mm the most, but likes the 85mm when she's out in nature.