

Serendipity played a part in the launch of Lissa Hatcher's career, as did talent, teachers and the U.S. military. Undaunted, Hatcher has learned how to go with the flow and find success wherever life takes her.

PORTRAITS

By Stephanie Boozer

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There's an old saying that the Earth was made round so we couldn't see too far down the road. Lissa Hatcher knew where her future lay, but it took a lot of twists and turns to get there.

Since she can remember, Hatcher was surrounded with artistic people. She would have liked to excel in drawing and painting, like her mother and brother, but the skill wasn't there. In high school, she turned to music, trying everything from band to chorus. She fervently believed her future lay in music.

Her plans changed after high school when she got married, had a daughter, and decided to put off college. "When I finally reassessed where I was, I didn't want to be a music teacher, which is probably the direction I would have gone in. My heart wasn't in it," says Hatcher.

Then there came a defining moment for Hatcher. Her uncle, a photographer, passed away, leaving his equipment to Hatcher's mother. On a whim, Hatcher agreed to accompany a friend on a short trip to New Orleans, and she asked to borrow one of the cameras to take along.

"It was a simple Minolta. I thought I'd take a few pictures, but I wound up taking 20 rolls of film," says Hatcher. "It was the most fun I'd ever had. I just loved it."

When she went to pick up her prints, the lab techs were excitedly looking through her photos. They assumed she was a professional photographer and urged her to enter an upcoming competition. Hatcher declined, but went home elated over her newly discovered potential.

# The art of flexibility

Artistic fulfillment may be hard-won, but the rewards are sweet

Hatcher's husband, a career military man, returned from an eight-month deployment to find that he'd been ordered to move to Maryland. Hatcher had two children now, but once she got both settled in their new schools she finally had a little time to focus on photography. It wasn't easy to find a photography course in an area with a heavily Amish population, but she found one course, already full, at a community college. With the help of her school counselor, she got in.

The instructor, a Kodak retiree, quickly took an interest in Hatcher's progress. After one semester, she found out the family would be moving within a year, this time to Oklahoma. Her saving grace was the instructor, who offered to guide her in independent study, and she was able to complete another three semesters.

Settled in Oklahoma City, Hatcher turned her lens on friends and acquaintances. She took any position she could find that would teach her more about photography, from working at labs to assisting other photographers.



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“I surrounded myself with photographers, asked a ton of questions, and begged anyone to teach me anything,” says Hatcher, who also spent two hours every day teaching herself Adobe Photoshop. She joined PPA and found her way to three mentors who provided the real-life guidance she needed. She developed a thriving home-based business, specializing in location shoots.

“I had planned on living in Oklahoma for a long time,” she says. “We bought a home, I had a full staff, and I planned on building a studio. But the military had other plans for us.” The family was off to Virginia Beach, Va. “As soon as I told my Oklahoma clients that I was leaving, I was swarmed,” she says. The flood of work gave her plenty of editing to

take with her to Virginia, but after clearing through it, she had to face the daunting task of starting all over. Hatcher called some photographers in the area whose work she liked and invited them to lunch.

“I basically told them, ‘I’m the new girl in town.’ I felt so lucky—they were all nice and welcomed me to the area,” she says.

Next, she looked up wedding coordinators and vendors whose clients tastes’ would be in line with her style, and did the lunch circuit with them. She visited the galleries around town and had her work shown, another way to generate buzz.

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never been big on advertising. Even just putting images on Facebook and tagging people is effective, because they all receive notifications. Then, boom, there you are.”

Though she’s been in Virginia for just a year, Hatcher is building another following. She travels to Oklahoma a couple weeks of the year to do sessions for devoted clients there. Her young business does a healthy mix of portrait, wedding, senior and musician photography.

Hatcher’s work has earned numerous accolades and awards. Not too bad for a woman who got sidetracked on the way to music school. ■

*See more of Lissa Hatcher’s work and read her blog at [www.lissahatcher.com](http://www.lissahatcher.com).*

