

Photo Finish

North Shore studios use classic film styles

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By Paul Peterson

Abstract:

PHOTO: Julie Floyd, a one-time tax attorney, opened Classic Kids, her portrait studio, at 566 Chestnut Street (in Winnetka)

When Andy Warhol predicted that everyone in the future would have 15 minutes of fame, he neglected to consider the timeless effects of black-and-white portrait photography.

In an age of computer enhancements, digital photography and manipulation of color, black-and-white portrait photography has captivated a loyal following – from urban high school art students experimenting with their first camera to suburban families seeking a visual refuge and an investment for posterity.

Portrait photography's origins date back 164 years when Frenchman Louis Jacques Mande Daguerre – an artist and gifted illusionist who worked as a stage designer in theater – introduced the “daguerreotype” to the public on the summer of 1839.

Although photography methods evolved and portraits increased in popularity throughout the first 40 years of the 20th century, the advent of color photos eventually displaced portrait photography until a renewed sense of appreciation for more traditional images contributed to their return.

Hip Shots

On a balmy Tuesday afternoon in August, portrait photographer Julie Floyd delicately hands a tissue to a middle-aged business executive who vainly attempts to wipe away evidence of a teardrop from his right pupil. The father of three has just finished reviewing the results of his children's two-hour photo session when he is suddenly overcome by the beauty of the portraits and the remarkable quality of innocence captured in the black-and-white images.

Classic Kids, a 1,100-square-foot portrait studio housed at 566 W. Chestnut St. in Winnetka, is the brainchild of one-time tax attorney Julie Floyd. Classic Kids Photography specializes in archival black-and-white and hand-painted portraits of children and their families.

Whereas many portrait photographers may direct a child to “sit still and smile,” Floyd and her team eschew this approach, instead opting to “spend time on the floor with the children” until the youngster finds his or her comfort level. It is this formula that allows Floyd and her assistants to capture and reflect on a child's true personality on film.

“The parents want the kid to sit still. It's painful,” explained Floyd with an obvious hint of exuberance. “We just let the kids jump and play around.”

Classic Kids' Winnetka location (which has been open for close to five years) is one of four studios owned and operated by Floyd. With two studios in California and another in Chicago, Floyd maintains a demanding bicoastal work schedule and still manages to do all of the photography in Winnetka.

“The thing I'm most noted for is baby parts,” Floyd said. “Baby Parts is a collection of nine square photographs of separate parts of a baby's body - from feet and hands to ears and bottoms. The ‘parts’ are then configured to surround a portrait of the baby's face in the middle. It's a distinguished art form that's often imitated.”

Another unique feature employed by Floyd and her staff is the portrait approach with museum quality fiber prints. Crafted on archival, warm-toned, fine art fiber paper, the process imbues superior detail and tonal range to a finished portrait that will last for generations.

“Americans in general are so in love with their children,” said Floyd. “They want to memorialize that childhood state.”

Although Floyd’s dream required severe sacrifices in terms of time and money, the leap from law to children’s photographer has clearly paid off. With a \$275 sitting fee and average order of \$2,000, Classic Kids seems well poised to replicate or exceed the \$2.5 million in revenue that was brought in last year.

Classic Kids, located at 566 W. Chestnut St. in Winnetka, can be reached at (847) 446-2064 or through www.classickids.net. Marc Hauser Portraits, located at 911 Green Bay Road in Winnetka, can be reached at