

A visit to Dan Brody's website is all you need to see why he describes his work as "Portraits from the Heart." Dan's portraits forego the stiff, formal poses and drift towards portraits of relationships. It is truly amazing that by simply removing his subjects' shoes and socks, a warm and tender feeling emanates from the images.

Dan and his wife and partner, Marcy, operate two studios in Pennsylvania: One studio is located in Bryn Mawr, and the other in the Chestnut Hill section of Philadelphia. They also photograph many children and families on the beach in Margate, New Jersey, approximately an hour from their Pennsylvania locations. Dan has specialized in photographing children and families for more than 30 years. He feels that the combination of his experience, artistic sense and desire to understand his clients has given him a unique position in the Philadelphia portrait market.

Dan's interest in photography began at the age of eight, when he saw a professional portrait that a great uncle had created of his mother as a child in the 1920s. Although he never met his great uncle, his work, and specifically this portrait of his mother, inspired Dan to follow in his

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footsteps. With a darkroom in the basement of his childhood home, Dan's father taught him how to develop black-and-white film and how to print the negatives. His career began the summer of his eighth year while at camp, when he began photographing his friends and their events with his Kodak Brownie.

Dan earned money while attending Penn State University by photographing sorority formals, outdoor portraits and any other assignments he could obtain. After graduating, Dan opened his first studio in State College, Pennsylvania. Although successful with his studio, Dan felt that something was missing and that his work was not truly challenging him. With a wife and two small children to support, he knew he had to do more.

In 1983, Dan attended a convention in Atlantic City and listened to Charles Lewis, whose upbeat message impressed and invigorated Dan to attend more of his seminars as well as weeklong seminars with Al Gilbert, Tibor Horvath, Don Blair and

others. These speakers encouraged Dan to photograph with more emotion.

In 1990, with Marcy's encouragement, Dan moved his studio to Philadelphia. He was no longer the big fish in the small pond—he was now operating in the big seas. They maintained their studio in State College for an additional six months while they began to grow their new business. Dan says it was not until Marcy left her sales job in 1994 and joined him in the business that they really saw major growth. With Marcy taking over the marketing and business operation, Dan was able to concentrate on perfecting his personal style of

photography.

Dan says that his studio's "Barefoot & Warm" slogan is a philosophy about people: The person as a whole is so important to photograph, and Dan wants to work with the whole person. Some of the inquiries his studio receives ask if they are "the barefoot photography studio." Dan says, "I think what makes my work interesting to my clients is that there is consistency, and yet each piece speaks separately about the

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BY HARVEY GOLDSTEIN



family or children in the portrait.”

Early in Dan’s career, he experimented with different colored backgrounds as well as cropping the portraits at mid-body or at the shoulders. He sensed that when he photographed full-length, his portraits took on a different feel—they were more emotional, they had a better flow, and they spoke to his clients. He also felt better connected to his clients when he was not including just part of them, but all of them. This method gave him a better story to tell of his clients.

Dan began his “Barefoot & Warm” idea as a pragmatic way of dealing with people’s shoes and their scuffs, untied laces, and dirty soles. This was before digital artistry, when airbrushing out dirty or clashing shoes was difficult and costly. Because Dan photographs the entire body and not three-quarters or head and shoulder, he needed to figure out a way that the shoes would not become the focal point of his portraits.

As “Barefoot & Warm” evolved, Dan noted that feet had emotion much the same as fingers and hands. It was important to him not to hide all of that emotion inside a sock or shoe. “I love that ‘barefoot and warm’ is somewhat a contradiction in terms,” he says. “Most people think of being barefoot as having cold feet. I think being barefoot allows the warmth to come out from the person.”

Dan notes that adults tend to be a little more tentative about allowing the emotion to come out through their feet, but children are very responsive. Parents often comment during the sales presentation how much they love the fact that they can see their children’s toes. Most adults who are initially tentative warm up to the idea as the session progresses. “I love the simplicity, the ‘less is more’ idea.



Plus, it adds such a wonderful dimension to my work,” Dan says.

Marcy, who heads up the marketing for the firm, makes sure that Dan’s work is visible to the public. She changes window displays often, sometimes taking advantage of having two geographically separate studios to simply move portraits from one studio to the other.

Referrals from satisfied clients constitute the largest portion of Dan and Marcy’s business. To help build and maintain their name recognition in the marketplace, Dan and Marcy use direct mail, periodic advertising and donations of gift certificates to many charities in the greater Philadelphia area. An informative website that highlights examples of Dan’s work, a video that introduces the business and shows satisfied customers talking about their experiences with Dan Brody Photography, and a commitment to providing extraordinary service are also key elements of Dan and Marcy’s marketing approach.

In addition, Marcy has developed a charitable-giving aspect to the business. Each year, she selects a cause with a focus on women and children, and she organizes a spring event where the money raised is earmarked for that specific organization. The recipient of Marcy’s 2007 charitable event is Laurel House, a non-profit Pennsylvania organization that provides shelter and other services to victims of domestic violence and their children. Marcy is also currently working with The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia on an exhibit to be placed



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in the Cardiac Center, where it will be viewed by over 3000 children, their families and hospital staff each year. The exhibit is entitled "Voices of the Heart" and will include 30 framed portraits of children and their families donated by Dan Brody Photography.

Dan's camera of choice is the Hasselblad H1 with a Phase One digital back, and he uses Elinchrom and White Lightning lighting equipment. The studio made the switch to digital two years ago, when the technology became portable enough that it did not break the connection between Dan and his clients. "The image control that digital gives you is phenomenal," says Dan. "Now you can make subtle adjustments in exposure, color temperature and color contrast that really enhance the beauty of every single image from a session. In addition, when you're in a session, you know exactly what the results are immediately, maybe something your eye missed, and you can make adjustments right on the spot."

Another successful transition for Dan Brody Photography was a recent move to a new studio. "The new studio is just a great space for working and creativity," Dan says. "The atmosphere is warm and calming, and people really feel comfortable here. We've also got much greater visibility in the community from this location. Marketing-wise, the space is really a reflection of our vision and philosophy of doing business, and people get that as soon as they walk in the door. We're able to really show off our work to best advantage, and we've also been able to expand our services in terms of custom framing and the behind-the-scenes aspects of comfortable dressing rooms and so on. We're also extremely proud of the fact that the entire building is set up to be a completely



handicapped-accessible space, and we really get a thrill when that accessibility makes a difference to a client."

Ultimately, making a difference to his clients is what Dan's work is all about. "The emotional part of 'Barefoot & Warm' is about the intimacy I have with my clients," he says. "They are opening their private lives to me, sharing their relationships,

including me to be a part of their family, if only for an hour. They entrust me to create something that will be a part of their lives and in their hearts. Allowing myself some

vulnerability is the key to expressing myself in the most natural way; it is the intent and essence of 'Barefoot & Warm.'"

This is an exciting time for Dan Brody Photography. With a new studio and website, new photographic approaches, and new marketing and product ideas, Dan Brody Photography is poised to flourish. As Dan says, "I am entering a new cycle, learning new things, new ways to photograph, yet still loving that I can create wonderful personal art for my clients." Visit www.danbrodyphotography.com.



Harvey Goldstein from Branford, Connecticut, has been in the photographic industry for more than 30 years. He is a former studio owner and presently edits numerous association newsletters and magazines, as well as being a freelance writer.

