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Nuptials nuance: St. Albans bridal photographer on top of the world Down Under

By Sandy Wells
Staff writer

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- On her fourth birthday, her mother gave her a Kodak Instamatic. From the moment she unwrapped it, the shutter never stopped clicking. She photographed her baby sister, her mother and dad, again and again.

Click. Click. Click.

She photographed everything around her. Toys. Stuffed animals. Her dolls.

"My mother couldn't keep me in film," she said.

Click. Click. Click.

"I'd dress up my Barbie dolls like brides, line them up and photograph them."

Even then, Robin Foster understood the specialness of photographing brides.

"In a child's imagination, brides are the epitome of beautiful and glamorous princesses. Every little girl thinks about being a bride."

In fairytale fashion, when Robin Foster grew up, she got a job photographing models for a wedding gown company. She shot 16 catalogs, 300 brides in each one.

Next, she focused on weddings. Word got around - around the world, apparently. Her credits include a wedding in the Czech Republic. She's leaving soon to photograph a wedding in Japan.

In Australia, on Currumbin Beach, she took her favorite wedding shot - a picture of the bride and bridegroom kissing underwater.

She just returned from shooting a wedding in San Francisco. "That one was in City Hall. It was like a Cinderella's palace in there."

She recently photographed a wedding on a Canaan Valley mountaintop. The wedding party rode a ski lift to the ceremony site and slid back down the mountain on a tube.

The 30-year-old St. Albans native is making quite a name for herself as the eyes behind Foster Photography, a classy commercial and wedding photography business based in Brisbane, Australia.

"I'm a 40-minute drive from the most gorgeous beaches you've ever seen. In Australia, it's wedding season all year round. The sky is amazing. Beautiful clouds every day. Interesting red sunsets. A unique backdrop for every wedding you shoot."

International bridal magazines feature her work, including mainstay Modern Bride.

During a mid-August visit with her parents, Barbara and Bob Foster, she shared the story of her growing worldwide prominence as a wedding photographer.

"I didn't grow up saying I was going to be a wedding photographer," she said. "I just loved photography."

She clicked her way through school. "I wasn't on the yearbook staff, but when they were missing track photos or pictures of kids having fun in the halls, they came to me and I supplied them. I took pictures of everything."

As a senior, she wanted to take a class in photography, a subject that wasn't offered at St. Albans.

"The school board gave me permission to travel to South Charleston High School for one period a day. It was good that they did that."

Because that's when she knew what she wanted to do with her life.

In 2000, she graduated from Ohio University with a degree in visual communications/photography, then worked for six months as a freelance photographer's assistant in New York City.

Next, she enrolled at Griffith University in Brisbane for a master's degree in photography. During her senior year at OU, Griffith officials visited the campus to promote a semester-exchange program. "Not many schools offer the kind of master's degree I wanted. OU does, but I wanted a fresh take. I wanted to listen to new professors. Australia was highly recommended."

She fell in love with the world down under. "I didn't want to leave Australia, but to get permanent residency, you have to have a master's degree and a full-time job in the profession you received your master's in."

Photographers generally work on a contract basis instead of full time, she said. "So I got creative. I found a company that makes wedding dresses. Their photographer had just moved." She convinced them to hire her as a full-time staff photographer and earned permanent residency.

When that company moved to America, she stayed in Brisbane and started her own business. "It's predominantly bridal. Even most of the commercial work I do is bridal-related. People are always getting married. That started taking me places."

Places like that City Hall wedding in San Francisco. "The couple had selected 20 guests who memorized a dance routine to 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow.' Then the music switched to 'Thriller,' and they came out of the audience like zombies, complete with fangs, and they performed a segment from Michael Jackson's 'Thriller' video."

She's accustomed to offbeat scenarios. "The first wedding I did, 11 years ago, the wedding party danced down the aisle."

The wedding she shot on Currumbin Beach in Australia was her biggest memory maker. The couple picked up on a concept called "trash the dress," an offbeat form of wedding photography that places elegant bridal gowns in such contrasting settings as muddy fields, garbage dumps and abandoned buildings. The day after the wedding on Currumbin Beach, the wedding party returned to the shore in full bridal regalia. She photographed them cavorting under the turquoise water.

She prides herself on capturing the nuances behind the wedding hoopla - that certain shared smile, a sleepy flowergirl, the candid exuberance of guests moving through the receiving line.

She always stays for the entire reception, she said. She snaps her best pictures after her subjects have loosened up. "A lot of photographers make the mistake of leaving early." During consultations with the couple before the ceremony, she looks for clues to the uniqueness of their relationship. "What's different in each wedding are the subtle details. I listen to the little hints they give me about what's important to them, what brought them together. I never get tired of listening to a bride. I love getting involved, because I'm able to reflect their personality in the photos.

"I'm the unofficial bridesmaid in a way."

She hopes to work more in America. "My dream is to overcome the obstacle of international boundaries and work in both countries. I'd like to work like maybe three months a year in West Virginia. The scenery here is beautiful. Last year, I shot a wedding in Kanawha State Forest. When anyone in Australia sees it, they say, 'Where is that?' I say, 'It's in West Virginia, where I grew up.' Australia isn't green. It's the red country."

She also takes assignments from the Australian government. "I follow Australian politicians around and shoot them shaking hands and presenting checks to people. It's not my favorite job."

No, her favorite "work" would be weddings. "I've never thought of that as a job. I think of it as a joy, something you do because you love it."

Visit Robin Foster's [Web site](#).



Bridal specialist Robin Foster, a 30-year-old St. Albans native, operates a worldwide commercial and wedding photography business in Brisbane, Australia. She started taking pictures as a 4-year-old, when her mother gave her a camera for her birthday.



The commercial side of Robin Foster's photography business focuses largely on bridal gowns for magazines and catalogs.



Silhouette at the sanctuary entrance provided this dramatic wedding-album photograph. Robin Foster bases her growing global reputation on an eye for subtleties, the intimate, unguarded moments at weddings and receptions that other photographers often miss.



Gleaming gold wedding bands take on added significance cupped in hands photographed by Robin Foster in black and white.



Employing a concept called "trash the dress," Robin Foster snapped her favorite wedding photograph - a bride and bridegroom kissing underwater at Currumbin Beach in Australia.