EQUESTRIAN PHOTOGRAPHER

CARA GRIMSHAW

By Cara Grimshaw

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MOST EQUESTRIAN PHOTOGRAPHERS START OUT WITH A PASSION FOR HORSES OR PHOTOGRAPHY. CARA GRIMSHAW TOOK 30 YEARS TO CONNECT THE TWO.

When the horse loving British expat and Vancouver-based aspiring photographer attended the London 2012 Summer Olympics as an editorial technician, her career path became clear.

"It was an amazing eye opening experience," said Grimshaw, who at 33 has already racked up a number of large international events including the World Equestrian Games, Showjumping and Dressage World Cup and most recently the 2015 European championships in Aachen.

Grimshaw spent most of her life on or around horses growing up in England, moving to Canada in 2015 leaving it all behind. To fill the emptiness that horses once filled, she discovered photography. In 2008 ,Grimshaw was encouraged to attend the renowned Langara College Photography Certificate program by her boyfriend, also a photographer after she purchased her first DSLR.

"I had the creative eye but lacked the technical knowledge of how to use a camera properly," Grimshaw said. *"It took a few amazing instructors and mentors continually pushing me to realize that I could indeed take this further than just a hobby, it scared me a little."*

She experimented with all types of photography the years attending college but it was action and photojournalism photography that she naturally gravitated towards.

"It was luck that I had a quiet day the same time as the cross country; I think I may have begged my boss to let me go," Grimshaw said. "I had my little Nikon D300 with no expectations and intending only have fun taking pictures of my favourite riders. I had such fun! I do not know why I had not connected my love of photography and horses sooner, I was kicking myself."

An office administrator of 10 years for a government corporation in Vancouver, it was to provide her financial stability for the next 3 years as she worked towards doing photography full time.

Grimshaw was signed up with the agency, Corbis Images, in 2014 which enabled her to have access to the high level events she needed to gain experience. The World Equestrian Games in 2014 saw Grimshaw finally able to photograph and meet her hero Carl Hester. *"I could not get myself over him being an actual human and standing there right in front of me!"* Grimshaw recalls her star-struck moment. *"I had told him about once having posters of him on my wall and now I was the one taking the pictures! He looked me in the eye and told me not to give up the determination as it is amazing how hard work pays off, isn't it?!."* Since then Grimshaw has photographed Hester a dozen times, finally getting over the star-struck excitement, which allows Grimshaw to get unique shots that go beyond the usual ringside images. *"Being overwhelmed limits my creativity, I get caught up in the* chaos of the emotions and lose focus on the framing, timing and lighting."

Open for business. Early 2015 Grimshaw officially set up a business and quit her office job.

"If it was not for my understanding and supportive bosses, mentors, friends and loved ones, I would not have had the chance to make the leap into entrepreneurship." Grimshaw states. *"Getting to this point, there were endless hurdles to overcome. Health issues from stress, financial limitations, work schedules but I always seemed to land on my feet."*

It was a big step for the 33-year-old. Despite the new freedom of being her own boss, Grimshaw knew just taking photographs is not enough to be successful – after all, many photographers fail within the first year of going it alone. So, she educated herself, along with her college instruction, in business marketing, social media and branding. *"I wanted be sure I was ready for the high seas known as the photography industry, I didn't want to drown from not having basic life saving skills,"* Grimshaw explained. *"I always had an interest in business communications and marketing so it was an easy learn for me."*

It has been a busy five months since going full time as a working photographer. Grimshaw has covered events in Europe and Canada, built a solid client base and is already making plans for the next few years.

Her next big goal is to attend Rio as a photographer, a huge challenge but one she isn't taking on lightly. *"I feel ready"*, Grimshaw said. *"It's tough financially, it's an expensive trip and persuading clients and sponsors of the value of good photography seems to be a constant challenge."*

The recent Aachen European Championships were a stepping stone to bigger things for Grimshaw, creatively and business wise. Grimshaw, specializing in the behind-the-scenes imagery, was delighted to shoot at the prestigious CHIO Aachen venue for the first time. *"I had freedom to shoot anything I wanted, spending hours sitting in the warm up ring and getting to know the riders' ins and outs, horses' characters and the amazingly hard working grooms' relationships with the horses. Catching those details that often go unseen,"* Grimshaw explains. *"My photography style really came through over the two weeks, I am thrilled with my images and I'm excited to work with my new clients I met at Aachen!"*

Be sure to follow Cara Grimshaw's photography adventures online as she continues to travel the globe. Cara is available for dedicated rider and team coverage and portrait sittings.

All photos by Cara Grimshaw

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Britain's Carl Hester and Nip Tuck

A practice session at the FEI European Championships, Aachen 2015

Britain's Charlotte Dujardin and Valgero