



A WEDDING IS LIKE A BOXING MATCH

BOTH WIN BY GETTING THE WRITESHOT

By Martha Blanchfield

Veteran fight photographer and journalist **Chris Cozzone** never even considered taking up wedding photography. That is, until his partner and co-founder of WriteShot, Natasha Chornesky, talked him into it. Working as a pro photographer for more than 20 years, he had shot his share of weddings. “I cover about 40 pro boxing shows a year from coast to coast and it occurred to me that a wedding isn’t much different from a big fight,” he quips. Chornesky grins with agreement. “In boxing, you have all these events leading up to a fight, from press conferences, to workouts, then weigh-ins. Next, you have the events of the big day. Not much different than a wedding, except instead of workouts, there are dress fittings. Instead of press conferences, there may be a rehearsal dinner. And the day itself? The wedding is the main event—only the principals involved aren’t exactly pummeling one another.”

Cozzone and Chornesky comprise a team who is fashioning a new style of reportage that preserves important moments in a person’s life—recording them through a combination of personal narrative and telling photographs. Their new company is WriteShot. Cozzone’s comparison of a wedding to a boxing match became the first spark toward creating WriteShot. The second happened when Chornesky started pressing Cozzone to actually act out the comparison. “Hell no!” was Cozzone’s knee-jerk response. “I am not shooting weddings as a profession.”

Accustomed to blood, sweat and tears, he recounts the panic that set in, laced with visions of prancing about in a cheap tux and posing couples for fluffy shots.

“I imagined myself shooting couples skipping merrily through fields of flowers and tossing parasols in the air. At the end of an exhausting day I saw myself postprocessing thousands of images, running them through trendy vignette filters to create dreamy wedding looks. Screw that.”

Write It, Shoot it

Chornesky remained relentless in trying to convince Cozzone to take nuptials photography to the next round. After several months, he acquiesced. “Fine. But we’re gonna do it my way—straight-up photojournalism style, no BS, no cookie-cutter poses, no Eskimo kisses. If we do this we have to take PJ to the next level by not just shoot weddings, but by writing about them.”

Together Chornesky and Cozzone are paving a new future in wedding reportage—not wedding PJ, but wedding journalism. Their combined talents yield a WriteShot book—an assemblage of photojournalistic images taken by both photographers, plus narrative captured and written by both. Cozzone explains, “We create very personal books; legacy pieces that families will treasure. When we’re hired to cover a wedding, both Natasha and I attend all the important events or activities the couple wishes us to attend. Not only are we shooting, but we’re profiling, interviewing and observing. We write the client’s story as it unfolds or is told to us. We even dig into the couple’s history, to tell the story of how they fell in love.” Each assignment is a very personalized task. As a result, no two books are the same because every client has a different story.



Marla & Aaron

Five Years & Lots of Drama

It was about five years ago, in the summer, when a friend of mine asked me and a friend if we'd like to make some money. "A buddy of mine owns a car dealership and he's looking for help cleaning and detailing cars," he told us. So, we went over to the car lot to meet Aaron. He wore this, "We're the guys your friend told you about." He was like, "Great, when can you start?"

Oh yeah, I brought a friend the first, but I became more of an excuse to have fun around. I think Marla and her friend and I were there for, we just started hanging out. There were some problems, though. One was, I had to both not get married, I was doing all the time. The drama began... (the end of it)



walks in and out of the Director's studio setting was discussed, but that didn't stop Price (his cousin from paying the bride a visit... Shortly after noon, Disney stopped by the suite to check in on his daughter.

"We like a big (dramatically heavy-weight fight)" and the general "P" (P) of the Hollywood South Coast, a job that helped launch the careers of Oscar De La Hoya and Paul Shriver. "I had an idea so much preparation went into this... wedding dress."

Disney gave his daughter a quick peek on the check. "Wow, you look beautiful."

By then, Price (he had switched back to Nike for second time giving Disney a short night before concluding the attack on the bride's the Department from the suite was supposed to be 1:00 - we have before the ceremony began. Making that deadline, however, didn't look so promising, and the tension in the room began to rise alongside the temperature.

The ceremony changed back to the control of Cozzzone, the Room girl, along with her mother, Elizabeth, showing off her delightful dress. Cozzzone smiled around the room, stopping only for a quick glance, applied by her mother.

With so many women in the room, Disney cut his visit short to get to the check on their promising to meet up with Price (he then, that is, should the bride get there on time to share a few private moments before meeting her down the aisle.

"That's more Price (he)" the bride was told. "Like your time - there can't be a wedding without you!"

Fighting back the nervousness, Price (he tried to ease the gathering, though she was unable to eat anything but water and squares. All her teammates and family, her mother tried to get her to eat something.

"She's on the security list," explained her mother. "We're the star of the show, so, even though they don't seem to be."

Disney had the best adjustment for setting.

"We thought if you don't eat, you'll get stomach acid building and then you'll get bad breath. And you have to have a lot of people trying to hook you up husband, so eat something!"

In the Ring Together

Cozzzone made his mark by exploring the gritty side of life—covering prisons, gangs, prostitutes and, in the past 10 years, boxing. His images and articles have appeared in publications such as *Newsweek*, *The New York Times*, *Penthouse*, *Playboy*, *Der Spiegel* and *Ring Magazine*. Chornesky spent 15 years teaching journalism and serving as a middle school principal, during which time she worked with more than a thousand families from all socio-economic backgrounds. She eventually resigned to pursue photography and focus

on developing a vision.

The two met four years ago while covering boxing in Las Vegas. Chornesky shares, "over conversation I learned we both had this interest in photography and we were both published writers. I also learned he too shared a passion for telling people's stories." As their concept to reinvent wedding reportage started taking shape, Cozzzone questioned, "Why should only athletes and celebrities have their lives documented? Everyone has a story." In shaping this new business concept, the two debated how to document important life stories, how to

include photographs with stories, how to market a product and, most importantly, what would that actual product be?

They eventually settled on a classic book style. The immediate challenge was then to find a vendor able to consistently produce high-quality archival editions for their creations. "We create legacy content so it's imperative the product be able to physically stand the test of time," Cozzzone says. "We spent thousands of dollars experimenting with different vendors' papers, finishes and bindings. We knew what would go inside, but we had to be sure the edition would



beginnings

Salina & Mike

We were in Home Ec together in seventh grade when we first met.

We all had to take the class and our assignment was to make microwavable brownies. My partner and I made chocolate chip cookies instead, and we got in trouble for it.

I burnt my brownies in the microwave and it smelled like burned hair. Mike helped me clean up the mess.

My mom was her physical education teacher for two years in Las Vegas—she's been a PE teacher for 28 years now. I got kicked out of Christian school so my mom, after all these years of elementary, came to teach PE in middle school, where I was. Salina used to tell my mom all the time that she thought her son was so cute.



Details

Flourish with Old Pasadena's Castle Green and assisted with Priscilla's vision, wedding planner Mary Devin used to work making the venue's ballroom "romantic dinner weddings" and its salon and parlor. "Whisper your wishes."

Approaching the dinner entrance, Mary assumed what the space already provided and assumed what it could offer, before bringing Priscilla's dream to life.

Castle Green's salon and parlor rooms already had vintage seating, silver and velvet couches, oak, lacquer, dark brown leather chairs and modern table lamps adorned with beaded, Venetian-style shades.

"The chairs, lacquer and silver were already in place," said Mary. "We already had a meeting for us. And good thing—creating this would have been a lot of hard work. I thought it was pretty, but so it was."

There was just one addition needed for Castle Green's beautifully beautiful interior.

"The only thing it needed was mood lighting," recalled Mary.

Antique candles in glass votive holders lit the room, rather than modern, clear glass with clean lines, which would have worked against the construction team plan that was ultimately achieved. Surrounds flower arrangements and red rose petals surrounded the stunner candles, adding warmth to the already rich ambience.



last." Chornesky laughs, "When testing, we left one sample book in the trunk of our car in Las Vegas during the summer for four weeks—we needed to be sure the glue and binding components would endure and remain flexible. A second test allowed a friend's 2-year old to give it the 'page corner chew test.'"

Putting it to Pen

In a WriteShot wedding book, the pages may profile courtship, dress fitting, the prior day, rehearsal, the ceremony, reception, parting shot and honeymoon, but there's no steadfast

content recipe. Stories are illustrated with 100 to 200 photos, using 20,000 words gathered from observation, research and interviews. The layout is never cookie cutter—the writing and variety of photos shape how each page lays out. Cozzzone is chief page creator and prefers working with Adobe InDesign. They favor Photo Mechanic and Photoshop for photo management and retouching. Dreamweaver comes into play when working on their Web site or any special HTML marketing pages.

Most of the image layout is handled in Photoshop, then reworked using InDesign

for text flow. Prominent images dictate the layout. When working on the page layout, all three programs stay active—Photoshop, Photo Mechanic and InDesign. The duo continually jumps between all three. Cozzzone says, "a book is in a bride's hands within 30 days after the wedding date. By the time the couple returns from their honeymoon, a PDF is ready for review. After we add in a honeymoon finisher we'll send one more proof to the couple, and then it's off to Bay Photo."

Their standard book measures 10x10 inches and generally has an average of 100 pages printed on heavy glossy stock using



"Rivini. The dress is a Biondi. It's custom-made — handcrafted and handmade. It's made with Alençon French lace that is hand-embroidered on the dress. The lace of the dress is a silk Milano, which is the most expensive fabric you will find in bridal gowns. It's a delicate fabric and it's not as shiny as satin, but it photographs ten times better. It has lots of shades and contrast in it, so it's really, really beautiful in pictures. There's a lot of lace on it and we added custom headband just to give it the "Priscilla touch."

"We custom-made her a Montilla veil, as well, which originated in Spain. The veil, first at the top, ripples down. It also has the Alençon lace to match her dress, all the way around, and it's cathedral length. When she is walking in the church, it will fall another one foot behind her. When it drops, it will look as if the lace is attached to the bottom of her dress — but it's not. It's the veil that is that long. It's amazing. It really is. We ordered it for her in the lightest shade of white, which looks great against her skin tone. Most people can't wear that light a shade of white, but on her, it's perfect — it just goes."

"Priscilla was really nervous at first when she was looking at dresses. She was unsure. She didn't know which dress she wanted, but she did know she liked that dress. She kept trying it on and trying it on and trying it on — we all knew she wanted that dress. But Priscilla is very particular and wanted to sleep on it. So, she slept on it and then came back and tried it on again... and she slept on it some more. Everyone was telling her, "Priscilla, get the dress! This is the dress!" Finally, she said, "You get me right — this is the dress." She was funny. She knew all along, but it just took her awhile to come around." — *Tracy Johnson's Bridal Shop*



archival printing technologies. A dust jacket and lay-flat binding prepared with glue and saddle-stitch finish completes the presentation. "We've done baby books, dog books, horse books, surprise books, dedication books. You name it," Cozzone says. "We get a lot of men calling to say that they saw one of our wedding books. They'll ask if we can do something similar as a gift for a spouse." WriteShot can, and will, go the extra mile. "In fact, one of the more outrageous editions we've created was a hand-bound book using platinum Moroccan goat leather and six-inch fringe with pink stitching."

At present, the most popular WriteShot

wedding package offers weeklong coverage, three editions of a book, an online gallery and a disc of high-resolution images. The couple determines what they want photographed and profiled.

Uphill Marketing Round

WriteShot products are gaining solid attention now, but it turns out it's a lot harder to market something brand new and different, than something that already exists. "It soon became obvious we were carving out a whole new space," Cozzone says. "We approached wedding planners, venue hosts and even our brides to de-

scribe the vision. It was an uphill battle, but when we put an actual demo book in their hands they got it. And loved it!" Both smile when sharing how much fun it is to observe reactions from peer photographers and industry naysayers. WriteShot landed its first client in 2006, and that was through word of mouth.

Since then, the couple has been perfecting promotional tactics. "We've tried all sorts of marketing, but always come back to the importance of 1:1," Chornesky smiles. "I'm a relationship person and try to learn as much about prospective clients as possible, then I



propose a service and product to match their needs.”

Beyond word of mouth, WriteShot’s most successful promo tool has been building rapport with wedding planners and venue coordinators, who have clients looking for something different. Wedding shows have also opened some doors, but with this outlet too the duo isn’t trying to reach every single attendee, just the few who understand the product. “Brides will skim the volumes and if the light bulb goes off, then bam, we know they get what we’re trying to accomplish. So maybe that means we connect with only six of 500. I don’t persuade or pursue if that light bulb doesn’t go off—it’s just not worth it.”

The same goes with the 1:1 aspect when using social media. “We can’t personally connect with all of our Facebook friends, but we’re really good interacting with four to eight at a time.” Chornesky admits, “then there’s Twitter. I’m lousy at Twitter. I haven’t quite figured out how to tweet consistently and with value. Other shooters and

vendors use this service to stay fresh in the customer’s minds, but I count on one hand the number whom I think really bring information. We’ve just not hit on the right recipe, but we’ll keep trying.”

Then there’s the blog. “To develop these books, our clients share intimate details of their lives. But since we maintain a very strong commitment to privacy, we’re not about to upload a photo of them and then summarize with narrative. We have a blog, but at this point it’s pretty general and not about our customers’ lives.”

Customer’s Legacy

Cozzone shares that WriteShot customers are typically a bit older, well educated and traveled. They want something different. They are individuals who understand the importance of family history. Many times they may also be someone who has lived through the loss of a loved one, so thoughts about preserving family legacy are that much more imminent. For many, the

cost of the coverage does not become a sticking point. “When family history and legacy are important to a bride she will find a way to make this happen. What may even happen is that family members kick-in to purchase our services because what we do is that important to them.” Even after a book’s creation, WriteShot continues to preserve the memories by providing archival of images and book content for clients.

“A bride once told us that in trying to remember her wedding day everything was a blur,” Chornesky shares. “But when she saw her book’s layout all the happy memories came back to her. That’s so important to us. Despite the challenges we’ve faced in starting a new business, especially the fact having launched during such a horrible recession, we believe that if you create an outstanding product, provide excellent customer service and bring talent, your business will thrive no matter the economy.”

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