

RANGEFINDER

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Golfers await their turn at the tee while Samantha Cox, top, continues working on her latest mural on Thursday, Sept. 24 at Whispering Oaks Golf Course in Marshfield, Mo. After being furloughed from her job due to the pandemic, Cox dove head-first into her love of painting.

Photo by Tristen Rouse

For this issue, members of the Rangefinder staff asked MPW.72 participants about their journey to finding their story and their process. Read more about them below.

GEOFFERY STELLFOX

amy schaffer



Richard Abraham plays with his three kids in his home gym in Roselle, IL.

Photo by Geoffery Stellfox

When Geoffery Stellfox had to choose from 10 different story ideas, Richard Abraham's continued to stick out.

Abraham, a family man whose newborn son passed away in 2014, is a professional Muay Thai fighter, tombstone engraver and gym owner. Despite COVID-19 making it difficult for Stellfox to explore his home in Chicago, he had Abraham in the back of his mind as a possible subject – one of the perks of having a hometown version of MPW this year.

“Hometown is a little bit easier,” Stellfox said. “I would’ve been just as excited to

go to Missouri to find a story, but I pride myself on finding good stories quickly because it’s what I feel that I’m best at.”

Though finding the story was quick, Stellfox struggled to photograph a sports piece about fighting without holding down the shutter button. He typically uses a trial and error method of shooting, a difficult technique to maneuver with a 400 frame limit.

“My career is defined by me – pardon my language – f***ing up a lot, all the time,” he said. “I want to try and fail because I think

that makes me better, and I just don’t have the luxury to do that here.”

Within those limited 400 frames, Stellfox wanted to veer away from the topic of death in COVID-19 (“everybody was else gonna be doing that”), instead focusing on fatherhood, family and coping with loss. Ironically, he came back to the aspect of death with Abraham’s son’s premature passing.

“In a weird way, death has kind of defined his life. Coping with loss is a really universal theme that is always applicable.”

MARLENA SLOSS

cianna morales

Marlena Sloss, student at Missouri Photo Workshop, says masks seem pretty normal to shoot in by now. Photographing her story with only 250 frames proved to be the greater challenge.

Although COVID-19 restrictions aren’t getting in the way of Sloss’s work in Jasper, Indiana, she has encountered some other challenges over the course of the week.

“First, I decided on a story about a woman overcoming her PTSD from sexual assault during her time in the military,” Sloss said. This was a continuation of a project Sloss had started with the Dubois County Herald, the newspaper she works at. “But it was too much to be talking about it for her this week,” Sloss said. They decided to take a break, and Sloss pivoted to find another story for the workshop.

Now, Sloss is editing photos for a story about a mother of five children under five—a set of twins, and a set of triplets.

“I wish I had more frames today,” Sloss said, reflecting on wrapping up the project Friday morning.

It was a big day—the family was going to yard sales and Wal-Mart to pick out clothes and Halloween costumes for the kids. Sloss said she was rationing shots all morning.

Sloss is a graduate of Ohio University’s School of Visual Communication, and



interned with the Washington Post before taking up her role as staff photographer at The Herald a year ago. Her undergraduate degree is in psychology, and photojournalism was a natural progression for Sloss: both disciplines are all about understanding people, she said.

Sloss said she appreciated the support from her faculty members Sarah Leen and Bill Marr throughout the week. “We had awesome conversations about navigating a tricky line of access with the first story,” Sloss said. She looks forward to continuing to work on this story after the conclusion of the workshop.

A native of Juneau, Alaska, Sloss discovered something new about her adoptive hometown over the course of shooting her story. She was visiting the family’s three-generation home, and was in the backyard with them. “They have a persimmon tree,” Sloss said. “I didn’t know persimmon trees grow in Indiana.”

Photos by Marlena Sloss

From top: With five kids under age five, going through daily routines together is the only way to keep up. The five children, from left, Jerrad, Charity, Jaimi, Nikkole, and Kristoffer, bathe in the evening. Life multiplies with a full house of threes and twos; supper plates sit on the kitchen table while Nikkia serves spaghetti and garlic bread. Nikkole, left, Jaimi and Charity line their toes up so that Nikkia can inspect the dirt after playing outside and bouncing on the trampoline.

TRISTEN ROUSE

emmalee reed



Samantha Cox rolls up her son Bowen's sleeve as she helps him get dressed in the morning before school.

Photo by Tristen Rouse

Last September, Tristen Rouse was sitting in the MPW.71 headquarters in Boonville, dutifully making 450 11"x17" color prints for the End of Workshop exhibit created by photographers from all over the world.

"I was amazed at the level of talent and the level of visual empathy that were together in this place in the middle of Missouri," Rouse said. "Seeing everyone's photography that week was amazing."

This year, it's his turn.

The University of Missouri senior didn't decide to attend the workshop until late July after co-director Brian Kratzer reached out to him about an open slot.

"I sat on it for 24 hours before deciding," Rouse said.

He was initially unsure about participating

because he knew this year would be different from all the workshops previous, he said. While the virtual nature of the workshop was an obstacle, it was more of an opportunity to do the work he wanted, in his hometown of Marshfield, in southwest Missouri.

In a way, Rouse's experience amid the virtual workshop is pretty close to the traditional workshop.

As the only workshop photographer based in Missouri, Rouse has the opportunity to photograph small-town Missouri life, keeping in the tradition of MPW. And even though Marshfield is his hometown, Rouse said he hadn't made many photographs there.

"I got to town and it was very much fresh," he said. "I don't think I have spent a ton of time in Marshfield in the last few years, so I kinda hit the ground running at the start of the week."

Rouse said he chose not to do any research or reach out to potential subjects before returning home. When he got there, he said he found a town that was very much changed since the time he's been away at school.

So the beginning of his week was spent driving through farm fields and the now almost-unfamiliar town he calls home.

By Wednesday afternoon he found his story: Samantha Cox, an artist, mother and wife who made a commitment to her passion during the uncertainty of COVID-19.

Rouse finished photographing early this morning, with plenty of time to write his story, make an edit and tidy up loose ends.

In the end, he said the workshop was a "beautiful way to reconnect" with Marshfield, his hometown.