

Diane Graham sets example for obtaining publicity about her studio

Newspapers have a product; and their product is *news*. Without this product, they wouldn't sell papers. Where do they get their news? From YOU! Never be shy about sharing your great story with a reporter. An article about a special child is great news! Here's part of a full-page story about Diane Graham, special kids photographer and SKPA board member in Tucson.

She wields special-needs camera

By Jenifer Javia

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Growing up in Tucson, Diane Graham never had a chance to spend time with her sister, who is mentally retarded and autistic, because she lived in an institution in Coolidge. Her family visited her sister, René Peterson, on weekends and holidays, but that was it.

Graham always took a camera with her to snap photos of her younger sister so her family could share them when they missed her.

Graham, now 52, recalls her visits to the institution: "There were many other children and adults with varying degrees of special needs.

Many didn't live long, and many had no family to visit them, much less ever having anyone to take their picture and document their life as it was."

That early interest led to her career today as a professional photographer who works out of her home, which is on 5 acres of land.

"I figured, it meant so much to us, that I wanted others with a special-needs loved one to have photographs to share their memory," she said.

Last year Graham completed a course with Special Kids Photography, a nationwide organization of which she is a board member. Graham will help conduct a training in Tucson on May 1.

In December Graham added a studio to her land that is accessible to children and adults with special needs.

"It's the perfect spot," she said of her acreage. "I have a little bit of everything so people can pick and choose what type of photographs, and memories, they want."

In the studio, the lights and accessories are suspended from the ceiling, which leaves open space on the

floor so people with disabilities can move around more easily.

The floor looks normal from afar, but it has a special padding that provides a cushion in case a child or adult falls.

"I want to make it comfortable and safe for them to move around," she said. Another way she makes people feel at ease is with her collection of antique and



new hats, ties and other fun clothes and accessories.

"I love having dress-up clothing for anyone that wants to play dress-up, and put on a funny hat or a big jacket," she

said. "I find that often times children and adults like to dress up. They seem to be more comfortable, sort of like being someone else for a short time."

Little Sophia Smith-Gatto said she had fun getting her picture taken yesterday. The 3-year-old has osteogenesis imperfecta — better known as brittle-bone disease — and her mother is cautious about the places she visits.

"Her bones break easily, and we have to be careful about what surface she is on and the activities she plays," Rhonda Smith said.

"I am normally very nervous about how people will handle her, and even if they are aware of her disease, they don't get it. It was a relief having Diane work with her, because she knew what to do."

With most of her clients, Graham is hands-off, letting them do what they want to do, then capturing their natural reaction on film. Sophia was able to move around and position herself as she wished.

"I holded the bunny," she said after getting her picture taken with a bunch of stuffed animals.

Graham's sister Peterson, 46, enjoys dressing up and is quite a jokester. During a recent photo session, Graham dressed her sister in a bright red hat with a black bow, beads and a black velvet shawl, then Peterson tried to trick her

sister.

She pointed at her hat and said, "Black, black." Graham went along with it for a bit, because it made her sister laugh and she knows about her joking personality, but finally asked her,

"Now René, what color is your hat really?" Peterson broke out in laughter and shyly responded, "Red."

"This is what you have to do, you play with them. You make them comfortable," Graham said. "This is the way you will get the best photos."

"Strike a pose, René. You're a supermodel."

Photo by AZ Daily Star

06 Workshops (SKPA Accreditation)

Tucson, AZ - May 1 (Mon) Come to the workshop in Diane Graham's custom studio! 435.627.1628

Phoenix, AZ - May 8 (Mon) Workshop at ACCEL, school for special youth 435.627.1628

St. George, UT - Jun 19 (Mon) Vacation in So. Utah (gateway to many national parks) and start on the road to SKPA accreditation! 435.627.1628

Long Beach, CA - Jun 26 (Mon) 435.627.1628

Golden Gate School of Photography - Jun 30 (Fri) - CA Bay area - 650.548.0889

Seattle, WA - July 31 (Mon) - 435.627.1628

See SKPA website for details
www.specialkidsphotography.com

Special Kids Photography of America

is a nonprofit organization dedicated to "increasing the face value" of children with special needs.

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This newsletter is distributed via email only.

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