Vanessa Godoy Photography

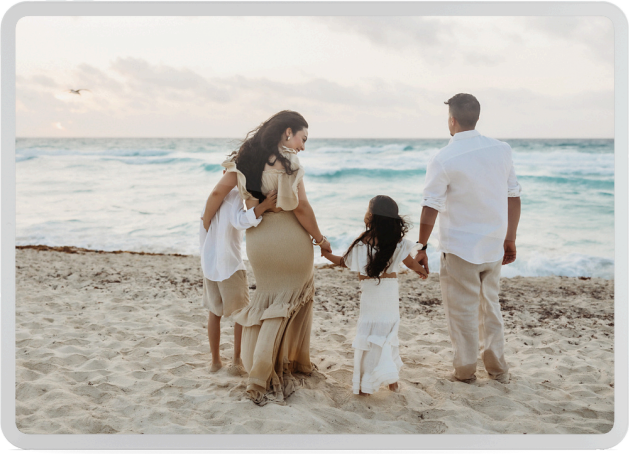
Vanessa Godoy's journey from a curious observer at her daughter's newborn photoshoot to a celebrated editorial photographer in the Quad Cities is a vibrant illustration of how passion, dedication, and a willingness to learn can cultivate a thriving business. Having called the Quad Cities home since the age of five, Vanessa's roots in East Moline provided a strong foundation for the artistic vision she would eventually bring to life.

Prior to embarking on her entrepreneurial path, Vanessa dedicated twelve years to the fast-paced environment of Village Inn, where she began working at sixteen and remained until she was twenty-eight. This experience in the service industry proved to be unexpectedly formative. "I loved it. I thought it was fun. It was hard for me to leave," Vanessa reflects. However, she recognizes that her time there was invaluable, stating, "My current job is very customer-focused, so the many years I spent in the service industry laid the groundwork for my photography business."

The spark for Vanessa's photography career ignited unexpectedly during a seemingly ordinary event – her then-infant daughter's professional photoshoot. Witnessing the artistry and the ability to capture precious moments, Vanessa felt a profound connection. "It was one of those moments where I thought, I would love to do this. And I just kind of went for it." Initially, photography was another creative outlet alongside her other hobbies like sewing and various arts and crafts. Her husband, she recalls, initially viewed it as just another pastime. However, by 2017, Vanessa had officially begun her photographic journey.

Vanessa's motivation to transform her newfound passion into a business stemmed from a desire for something more fulfilling than just a job. While working at Village Inn, she also pursued college, but a deeper yearning persisted. "I knew I wanted to do something I loved to do, not just a job. When I found photography, everything clicked. And one thing led to another. It all developed naturally after that." This intrinsic drive to pursue her passion fueled her initial steps into the world of professional photography.

"What I like most about owning my business is the flexibility." Vanessa enthusiastically shares. Beyond the freedom of setting her own schedule, she cherishes the process of building her brand and connecting with like-minded individuals. "I really love the way I have built my own brand and finding people that have the same vision that I do. I attract moms that love art and love their family and love creating art from moments like that. No moment is taken for granted." The deep relationships she cultivates with her clients, often photographing them through milestones from pregnancy to their children's early years, are particularly rewarding. "At this point, I've probably photographed over 500 clients. I've had clients come in when they're pregnant then bring their newborns in and also clients that come back even up until their kids are five years old. You really develop a relationship with the family."



To continually refine her craft and stay abreast of evolving trends, Vanessa actively participates in conferences across the United States, focusing on maternity and newborn photography. She also emphasizes the crucial role of mentorship in her growth, having benefited from the guidance of three mentors. "Mentorship is so important. I think back on it often and I don't think I'd be where I am today without my mentors." Her commitment to lifelong learning is evident in her statement, "I love to learn; knowledge is so valuable. Everything is always changing; social media, how you run a business – there's just so much to learn and I love it. I've invested heavily in mentoring and education."

Looking towards the future, Vanessa envisions a slightly larger studio space with dedicated sets, particularly as she currently operates without an assistant. While she collaborates with a makeup artist, she sees the potential for hiring an assistant in the future. Importantly, Vanessa plans to remain in the Quad Cities, "In the Quad Cities we're central to a lot of other locations. I've had a lot of people here that tell me that they're happy that they don't need to drive to Chicago." Her dedication to her craft has also garnered recognition, with consecutive awards for her work each year she has been in business, totaling eight awards to date.

Vanessa's connection with the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at Western Illinois University-Quad Cities began after taking part in the City of Moline's B.O.O.S.T Program. She learned about the opportunity through an informational meeting, applied, and successfully received funding. This led her to Ann Friederichs, Director of the Small Business Development Center at Western Illinois University, who has played a significant role in her business development. "I met Ann at the very beginning of this process and she helped me understand everything I need to know." The support Vanessa received from the SBDC, particularly from Ann, has been instrumental in her continued success. Ann provided guidance, connected her with valuable resources, and informed her about funding opportunities, including a recent grant from the Illinois Arts Council. Vanessa speaks highly of Ann's impact: "She's helped me so much, she's amazing. I wouldn't have known about the Illinois Arts Council grant without her, and receiving that funding has been incredible."

For aspiring entrepreneurs, Vanessa offers these encouraging words: "Sometimes it's hard to believe in yourself. Seek mentoring. And when you love what you do and put your whole heart into it, it evolves and naturally happens. Keep investing in yourself and your mindset." Vanessa's own journey stands as a testament to the power of self-belief, the importance of seeking guidance, and the natural growth that follows when passion and hard work converge.