



## Develops Instrumental Focus In New Photography Book

Lisa  
Johnson

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY EWASKO.COM

A free spirit from a young age, Lisa Johnson knew she didn't want to lead a normal life. What she didn't know is that she would connect with photography, art and guitars -- all in a very unique way.

"I never wanted to have a typical life with a big house and a white picket fence," explains Johnson. "I was born in California but my family moved to a very small town just north of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada when I was seven years old. It was so cold, I promised myself I would move back to the U.S. where it's warm and I would do something fun and exciting with my life."

Johnson found a way to warmer climes in her early 20s, getting a job in Florida working at Canaveral Pier. "I could go to the beach every day, definitely not normal. I saw photos on billboards and felt that the world would always need photographers, so I decided I would study photography.

"My father was a promoter for landscapers, always traveling and taking photos of the beauty of Alberta, so that inspired me. And, my mom always told me I could do anything I want if I put my mind to it. So, for role models, I had a dad whose job I viewed as adventurous and a mom who instilled in me the strength to follow my dreams."

While in Florida, Johnson studied photography at Brevard Community College. She then worked for a photo lab that developed top-secret film for aerospace companies, which ultimately led to a job with Kodak.

"I worked for them for 10 years as a technical sales rep," she offers. "I had territories all over the U.S. I worked out of my home and made my own hours, which is exactly what I wanted."

To be more informed about her job, Johnson would take photos using all the different films and papers she was selling. When Johnson moved to Memphis, her love of photographing guitars began by chance.

"I grew up in a musical family, and my dad always wanted a Gibson mandolin. I was dating a guitar player who owned a vintage guitar store. One day, a mint-condition 1917 mandolin arrived. I couldn't afford it, but my boyfriend said I could work for it, taking photos of some of his guitars. It was at that moment that I fell in love with the guitar as an art object. I haven't stopped photographing them since."

Six months later, Johnson was transferred to New York City.

"Every musician comes through that town, so I figured I might as well photograph famous guitars. The first was Les Paul's. He played weekly at the Iridium. He couldn't have been nicer."

And that one famous guitar opened all the right doors for her. "I had an original idea no one had done, an approach to the guitar as an art object. Fans can't get close enough to these guitars to see the wear and tear and even the backs of the guitar where musicians sometimes add mementos. These photos allow fans to appreciate those details."

In 2000, while Johnson was living in Las Vegas she found a literary agent and focused on creating a unique and beautiful book fans could cherish. It was a large financial investment and a journey of 17 years, but Johnson's drive and entrepreneurial approach produced a product, and the birth of a brand, she's proud of.

"Sometimes I just have to pinch myself. I came from Nowheresville and by myself I was able to gain access to very famous people's guitars. It's such an honor to be with these guitars, even for just a few minutes. It's the most wonderful feeling," Johnson says. "Now to be able to turn those images into this beautiful book and give it to the world to earn a living is the ultimate prize."

Sam Milgrom, CEO of Mr Musichead Gallery in Los Angeles, met Johnson a couple of years before she completed the book, and was so intrigued by it, he offered to hold her book launch at his gallery and turn the world on to her art.

"I represent over 50 photographers, but no one has done what she has," relays Milgrom of Johnson's book "108 Rock Star Guitars." "Her passion for rock n' roll and her background with Kodak lend a very different perspective to what she's doing."

"Her work is very specific to the guitar, the life of it and the stories behind it. Lisa gets up close and personal with the instrument so we can see the dents, the blood stains, the decorations. There's a realness to it I've never seen before. It's a very artistic approach which is why it's so revered."

"Her book is so beautifully done, from the vellum paper with the gold edges to the cover design and the stories of the 108 guitars themselves. People are responding very positively," continues Milgrom of the book available at [www.108rockstarguitars.com](http://www.108rockstarguitars.com).

"The images are warm and luscious. She has so much potential to take this global and launch her career as a photographer not only of rock guitars, but of other instruments as well. It's a natural progression for her." □