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Nolen turns garage into a pretty picture

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Studio J, born in a garage on Shelby road nearly a year ago, has been a dream of the owner, Joanie Nolen, since she snapped her first picture with a Brownie camera at the age of 12.

The homemaker-turned-photographer used to be teased by her husband that all she had to do to get a perfect picture was to push a button. Not so, said Joanie, who learned that hard work, patience, getting the right lighting, and practicing makes perfect.

She admits that she is still learning by attending extra seminars after going back to school after raising a family and working five years for a Shelby photography studio.

When husband Greg Nolen started remodeling the old Hardin-Bumgardner Garage on Shelby Road for an office and garage of his own, Joanie suggested part of the business would be perfect for a photography studio. A renovated four-room building now makes the perfect home for Studio J and adjoins her husband's business in the other half of the garage building. Blue awnings on the front of the building, a cozy reception area, a big shooting room where backdrops are provided for most all kinds of pictures, including a boudoir, and a dressing room, are beautifully decorated with blue predominating.

Joanie's studio is probably the only studio in this area which caters to boudoir or glamour photography. There is a white frilly bed where a lady can pose in teddy nighties or her husband's shirts. Glamour photography is big time in the area on Valentine's Day or birthday occasions when women want to give a unique gift to the men in their lives. Joanie makes appointments in the evening hours when the business is closed to regular customers and the customers bring their own props or use some of the nighties she has available.

Weddings, portraits, sports pictures and glamour photography are her speciality but she adores doing kids pictures because she likes to clown with them to get the best possible shots.

On a recent day, Hannah McGill, 2, daughter of Chip and Poppy McGill, was the perfect subject. Joanie laughed and coaxed the youngster by playing with her, using various lovable stuffed bears, a play telephone, and a robot that talks. Whatever it takes to get a good picture of a child, Joanie accommodates. She barks, if neces-



Joanie Nolen, left, makes Hannah McGill comfortable in a setting of stuffed animals at Studio J on Shelby Road. Nolen renovated

her husband's garage a year ago and specializes in children's photography.

sary, sings, plays music, and generally enjoys time on her agenda for entertaining a child and getting good pictures.

According to Poppy McGill her daughter was always shy and didn't want to pose for a picture.

Not anymore. Hannah McGill talked on a play telephone to her grandmother the entire time she was being photographed and laughed for the camera.

"Hannah is really the perfect subject," said Joanie, who called her on the real telephone to come for a picture when the reporter visited Studio J on a recent morning. Hannah, in perfect good humor for a two-year-old, said she had just made a date with her grandmother McGill to eat lunch at Peggy's Restaurant but she would be happy to drop by for several minutes. Before her arrival, Joanie placed all the favorite toys in the shooting room so that Hannah would be comfortable.

By lunch time when the photographer said 'goodbye' to Hannah they were on a first-name basis.

Photography started as a hobby

for Nolen, daughter of Lib Davis of Kings Mountain and the late Henry Davis. When her son, Alex, now 19, started Central School she went back to school herself and attended photography classes at Cleveland Community College.

Now Alex, who attends Gaston College, is his mother's chief assistant when she covers weddings. Joanie says she photographs every aspect of a couple's wedding and arrives at the church about two hours before the big event.

On a recent Saturday night she was the official photographer for the Junior-Senior Prom of KMHS and she spent from 5 a.m. until about 2 a.m. on a Sunday morning at Vauxhall in Shelby taking pictures and then loading up equipment and returning to her home on Somerset Drive where the family has lived over 20 years. Sometimes her husband accompanies her for shootings but usually son Alex offers a hand. Outdoor photography is also fun for Joanie and the whole family. They are active in Boyce Memorial ARP Church and Joanie teaches a college-age Sunday

School class.

"Taking time with a client is what I like to do," said Joanie, who says she never rushes through a sitting and schedules appointments so that she won't have to rush. Some of her best work, she said, is of beauty contestants who need 8x10 pictures for pageant portfolios featuring closeups of their faces.

A 1971 graduate of Kings Mountain High School, Joanie married Greg Nolen just after high school graduation. Greg has operated his own business, Greg's Auto Machines Inc. 13 years.

Joanie said that when she got the idea to open her own business in the old garage building the young couple didn't realize what a tough job it would be.

The tiles and carpeted floors used to be covered with oil and one section, now enclosed, used to be the bay area where the cars were driven through for repairs.

The photography studio is comfortable and ideal for grandmothers or brides who visit the shop for their boudoir pictures or for children and teenagers. The shooting

room is big and the dressing room has all the amenities of home.

A customer posed in a witches hat and a teddy, another posed in hubby's t-shirt, one wore her sailor husband's shirt, and another brought her husband's model plane for background when she modeled for pictures. Santa outfits are used at Christmas for children and adults and whatever outfits suits the customer's fancy.

Joanie says all the articles of boudoir clothing are in good taste and "nothing different from what you might see in a lingerie catalog."

"Most of my adult customers say they want to look a little different from what they look every day and the results are quite pleasing and make unique gifts," she said.

Joanie says she had fun planning the decor for the studio and most of her customers are pleased. She said she chose Kings Mountain for her business because it is next door to her husband's business and because she has always lived in the Kings Mountain area. Studio J, she said,

prides itself in giving the customer the best quality pictures for competitive prices. The only room missing from Studio J is a dark room. Joanie used to develop her own pictures but developed an allergy to chemicals and now takes the film to a Shelby firm for developing. Pictures turn out great every time if the photographer is tuned in to what her or she is doing and thinks and focus in on the subject, she said.

Budding photographers are given this advice: listen and learn from others and learn from your mistakes, you'll make them. Practice. Think about what will make the subject look good and work hard to create that look. Get the best lighting possible and use good equipment. If you don't like photography, don't get into the business.

Joanie attends most seminars for professional photographers. The most recent one was in February. Three professional photographers with live models illustrated how they create better images. They used real sets and set up props. Joanie follows these ideas in her business. Sam Young, Philip Birmingham, and Charles J. Lewis demonstrated ideas for 150 photographers. They featured senior portraits, bridal photography, weddings, and emphasized photographing men.

Men, Joanie says, are the most difficult subjects to photograph. Men don't like to have their pictures made.

"Usually when you make one or two pictures of a man he's ready to go home," says Joanie. What does she do? She talks and jokes with them. Soon they are ease and relaxed. Before they are aware of the time, she has made a dozen shots or more.

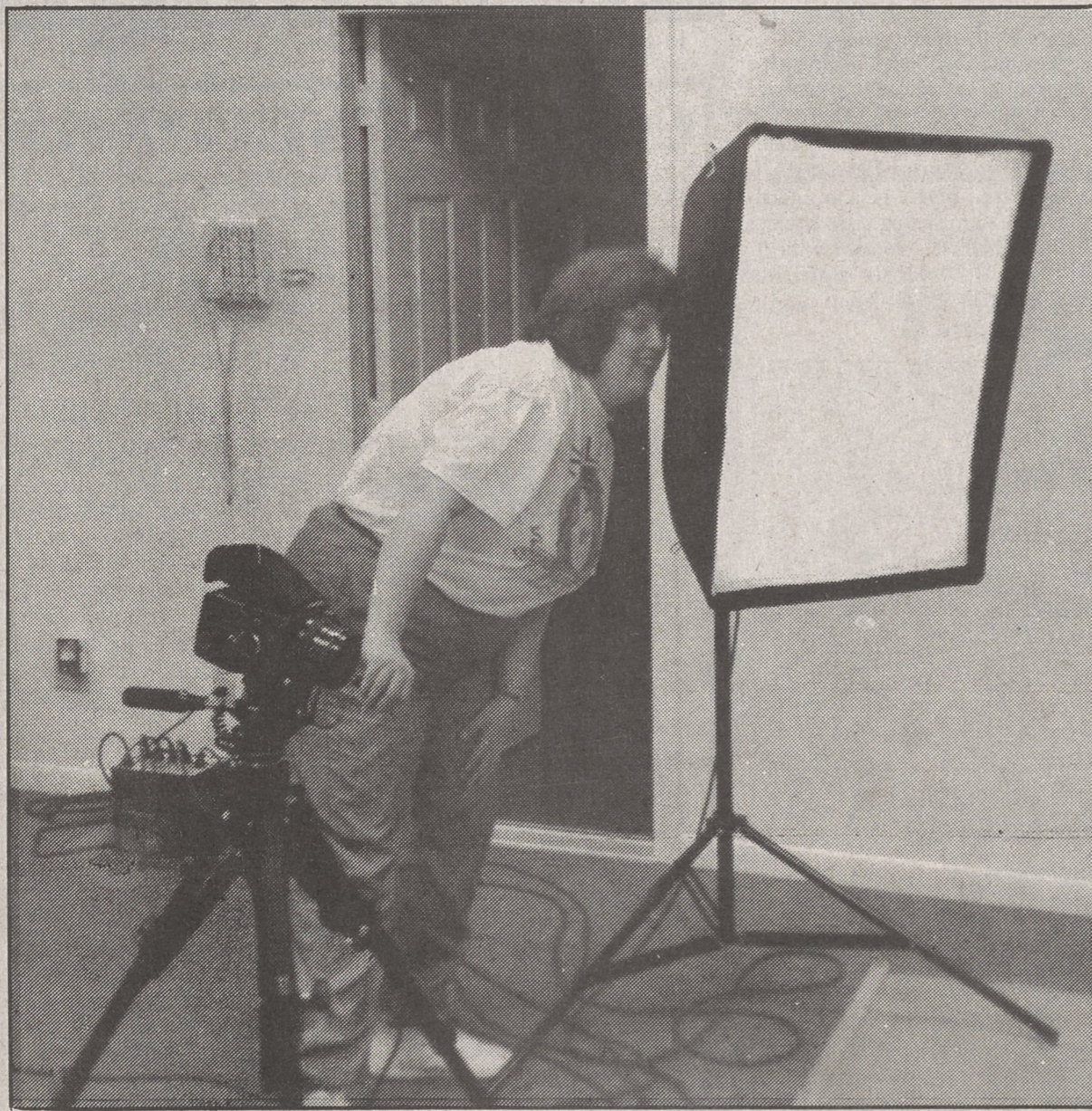
Joanie sister Terrie Southards has been photographing drag races for two years and loves it. She says her little sister taught her to operate the camera.

Purchasing the equipment was the hardest job for Joanie who learned early to shop around for best prices. She recommends that all budding photographers shop around for best prices on cameras and film.

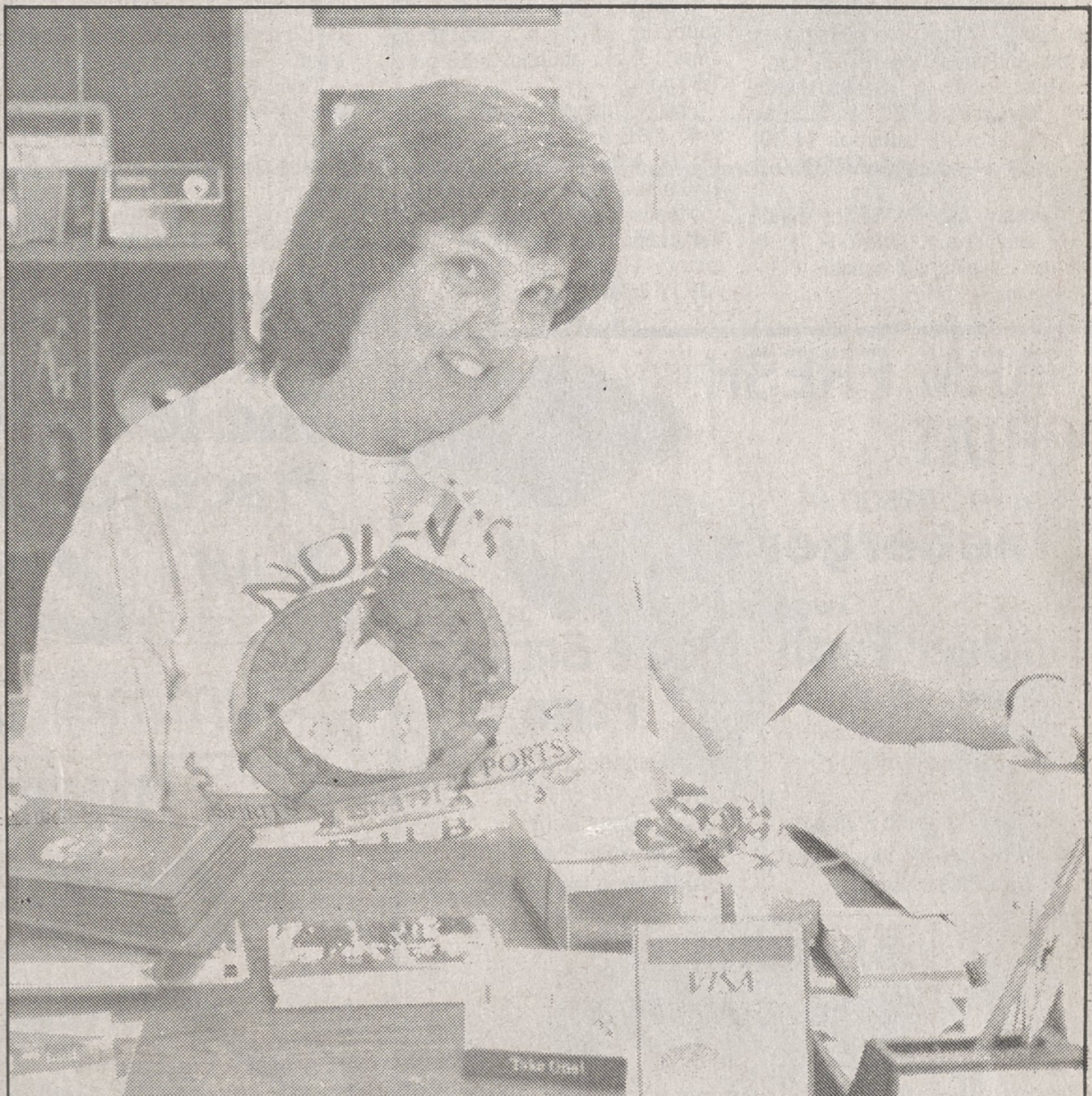
Any other pointers for pleasing customers?

Joanie says she has learned to shoot what the customer thinks he wants and then shoot what the photographer thinks is correct. "The customer makes the choice since he is paying the bill," she said.

Most important, she spends time with customers trying to get the best image possible.



Practicing makes perfect for homemaker-turned-photographer Joanie Nolen. Using good equipment and correct lighting are essential to turning out top-notch pictures.



Joanie Nolen sits at her desk in her unique photography studio on Shelby Road.