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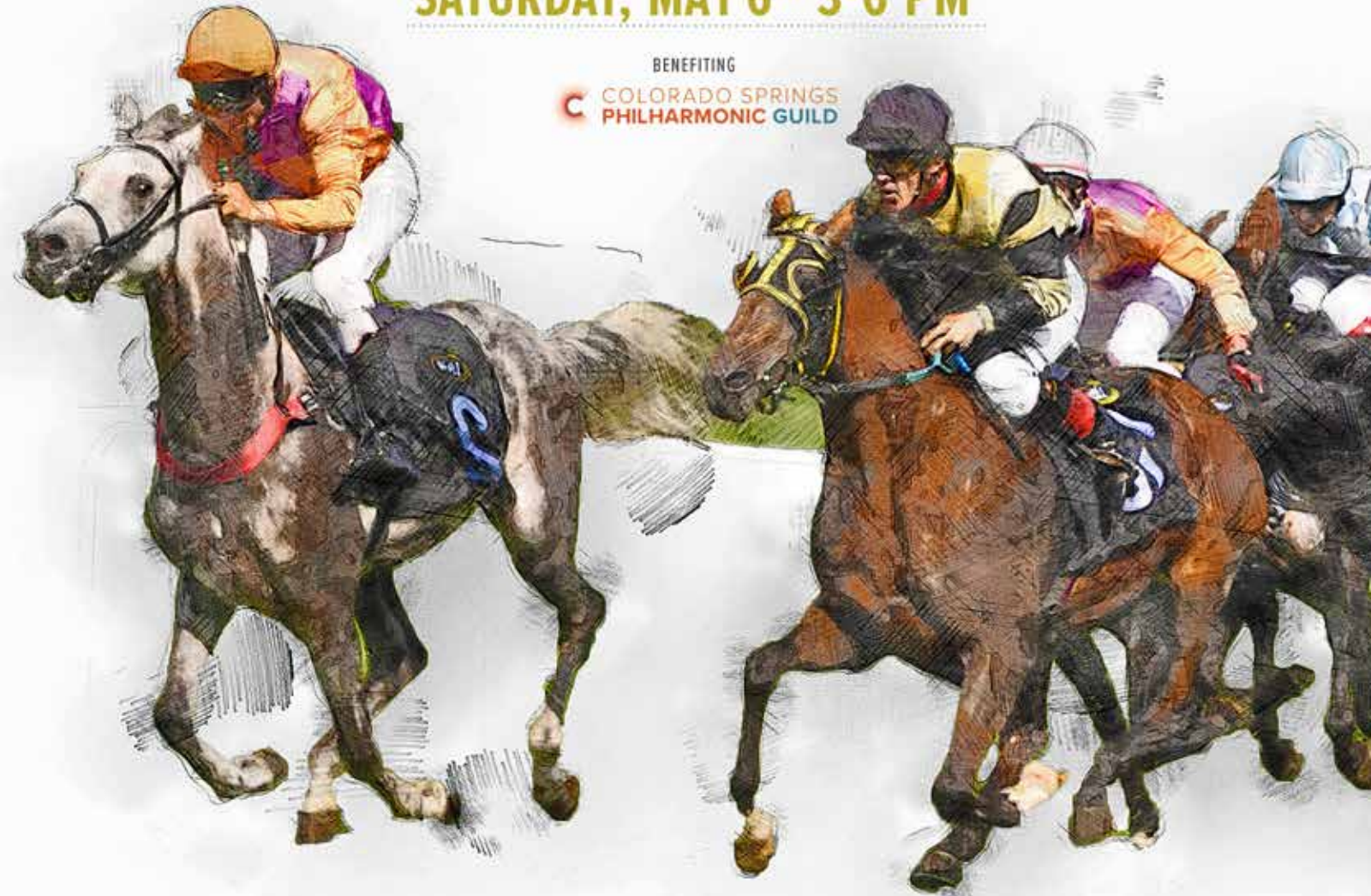
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For articles, coverage, and advertising, contact Brian Gowdy at 719-313-3028; [brian.gowdy@realproducersmag.com](mailto:brian.gowdy@realproducersmag.com).

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**Brian Gowdy**  
Publisher |  
Advertising Sales  
719-313-3028 |  
brian.gowdy@  
realproducersmag.com



**Sue Hunyady**  
Ad Specialist  
COSads@  
realproducersmag.com



**Heidi Mossman**  
Photographer  
719-789-5558



**Maria Bay**  
Photographer  
541-213-5435



**Ruth Gnirk**  
Writer



**Stephanie Brewer**  
Writer



**Sara Cripe**  
Social Media Manager  
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**Geneva Eilertson**  
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## Situation 11: Bees Nest in Home



To bees, wall voids look like empty logs that provide perfect nesting sites. Historical houses were sometimes even outfitted with hives in the walls to allow easy access to honey and good crop pollination. But they can be a problem, as we found out in one of rental homes.

They can pose a sting hazard if near humans or pets. Their buzzing can become irritating, even to people inside the home. If the colony dies, its beeswax combs are no longer ventilated by fanning wings, and may melt and stain interior walls with honey and wax.

To avoid this problem, caulk or cover with screen any bee-sized holes such as knot holes, gaps in siding, and openings around plumbing or electric wires.

Our client did not want a hive in his walls. He wanted them removed. If you wait more than a day or two, this process becomes costly. The walls are opened, the bees vacuumed out, and each comb removed separately. As bees are beneficial insects, they should be moved to new quarters, then the wall resealed.

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# NOTE

Friends in real estate, welcome to our April edition of *Colorado Springs Real Producers*! As of writing this, we are just finalizing the nominees for the 2023 RP Awards.

On the surface level, choosing nominees for an awards gala sounds like a blast but, in truth, it's the most challenging part of my career each year. When choosing five agents to be nominated, you're also passing on fifty who have outstanding qualities of their own. It's decisions like these that make me thankful that, in conjunction to The RP Awards, I run *Colorado Springs Real Producers*. While features inside the magazine don't come with a shiny trophy, they are still a meaningful way to recognize agents who may not have been nominated this year but still deserve to be recognized. Spotlights in the magazine will always be our main award.

I'm proud of this month's magazine. Jennifer Dion, our front cover feature, is one of the most warm-hearted agents I've met in my career—and she is a wonderful person to know if you enjoy local honey! Rhonda Covey has such an interesting background, having worked in so many elements of real estate

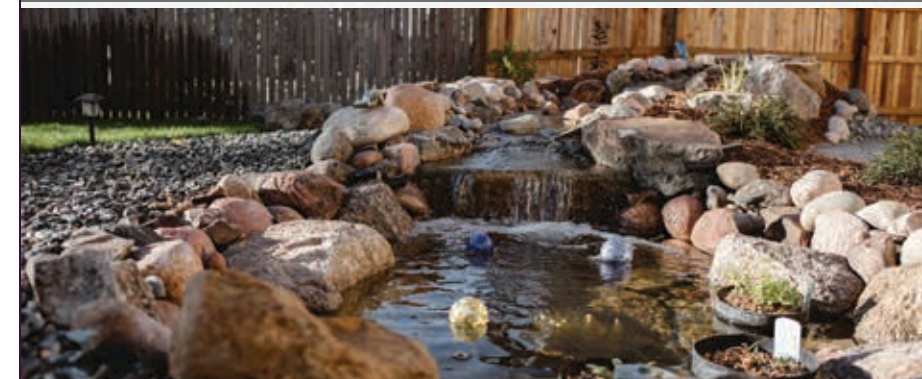


and riding motorcycles. Jason Lyman is a down-to-earth agent who loves to DJ music in his spare time!

If you know of an agent who is an outstanding representation or a real estate vendor who does phenomenal work, we welcome you to nominate them to us. We want *Colorado Springs Real Producers* to be the platform that recognizes the best of Colorado Springs real estate.

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# Rhonda Covey

▶▶ **overcomer**

Written by Ruth Gnirk  
Casa Bay Photography

## “It’s Never Too Late”

*Rhonda Covey knows a lot about second chances. She has been involved in nearly every aspect of the real estate industry spanning three decades of an escalating career, serving the community through her experiences running title companies, processing mortgages, loan underwriting, and loan closings. She now uses her experiences, awareness, and tenacity to help others see through the chaos to work through the drama and trauma so they can achieve their goals. Her career and family are proof that regardless of the trauma a person has experienced, it is never too late to start over.*



Childhood was rough for Rhonda. She experienced tragedies no child should be exposed to, let alone endure. As most young people do, she rebelled and was then labeled “a bad kid.” Although it was the adults in her life who needed the reprimand, it was Rhonda who was passed from home to home as family members were unable to “deal with” the real issues that motivated her to rebel in the first place. She was transferred between homes in southern California and west Texas throughout much of the 80s before graduating from high school.

Needing to support herself and her young family, Rhonda got serious about her career. At age 20, she became a receptionist at a title company. She became fascinated by the real estate industry, and within her first two years Rhonda was promoted to Processor then Closer, and ultimately Branch Manager.

### **Something New**

In early 2006, Rhonda noticed some disturbing financial trends that would soon be impacting the real estate industry, and it prompted her to change careers. She became a flight attendant for a short time. Due to a life-threatening event while in the air, her career was cut short, and she made the decision not to continue flying.

In 2008, Rhonda said goodbye to Texas and moved back to Southern California. She took a job as a mortgage processor, leaning on her earlier experience at the title company. Propelled by her background and desire to serve clients with

keen accuracy, Rhonda started back in the industry. She processed mortgages while looking for the perfect title company.

In 2010 he was offered a job managing a team of 70 for a nationwide title company. Within a year, she built up her reputation as an excellent Escrow Manager. She was so keen on details that her services were requested by dozens across the country. Rhonda was respected as a leader and had made a name for herself in a highly competitive, highly demanding industry.

The industry was recovering from “the fall” of housing. In 2014 she received a welcomed call from an eighth grade crush who caught up with her online. She and James had remained friends and spoke to each other occasionally, but this time it was different.

Rhonda was older and her children were grown. James still had young children and lived in El Paso. In the spring of 2016 James moved to Colorado Springs. He and Rhonda were ready to explore the possibility of becoming a couple. Rhonda moved to Colorado Springs that summer, and the next year she married the love of her life. Although it took a “mere” 35 years, she married her childhood sweetheart!

### **A Season of Growth**

Shortly after becoming Mrs. James Covey, Rhonda received an opportunity to fulfill her heart’s desire to step back into the title industry as Branch Manager. However, the industry had changed.





Rhonda decided to earn her real estate license in 2019 and she fulfilled her goal in record time. Within one week she was a licensed REALTOR®! She joined a new brokerage and began the journey of building her business. She is forever grateful for the broker-owner who gave her the opportunity and support she needed to build her confidence and become successful.

In 2021 Rhonda joined a brokerage with a team that excelled her expectations, and by the end of 2022 Rhonda and her team have helped 120 families achieve their real estate goals.

“I joined The Cutting Edge, REALTORS® for the benefit of growth and business, shared values, and mission,” reflected Rhonda. “They provided the tools that catapulted me into the person and REALTOR® that I am today, and I am forever grateful. My growing team was comprised of

agents who were new to real estate, so I focused my efforts on building up their confidence and strengths as much as their skills and knowledge. I focused on empowering each team member to become the best version of themselves as I, too, was transforming into the best version of myself. It’s a continual process and we are learning together. Talk about bonding!”

#### **Living the Dream**

When Rhonda looks back over at her life, career, and booming business, she sees a continuous process of growth. She is proud to be part of a brokerage that has been ranked Best of the Springs for over four years. Their mentorship and support have enabled Rhonda and The Covey Properties Team to become the power team they are today!

Her vast experience in every aspect of the industry allows her to serve her

clients and team through every stage of the selling and buying process. Her knowledge and insights help her find creative solutions to get people into their dream homes and honor time frames set by sellers.

“Being a REALTOR® is the greatest career I could hope for,” said Rhonda. “I can use all the knowledge I’ve garnered across the industry over the years to serve people in what is likely the largest and most important investments of their lives. Your home is your haven, and I am honored to serve people during this tender and emotional process.”

“My resilience becomes their resilience, and my skills and strategies become their leverage,” she continued. “No one can serve clients in the complete manner we can and do at The Covey Properties Team because of our well-rounded experiences and insights across the industry and in life!”

Rhonda knows what it’s like to struggle. She has been knocked down, but she



always gets up again, creates a new vision, reinvents herself, and finds new areas to succeed. She brings the power of resilience and positive thinking to her clients, her team, and others.

“When life hands me lemons, I don’t just make lemonade,” she quipped. “I make delicious lemon desserts that sweeten the sour!”

**Motivation**

There are several causes and organizations dear to Rhonda’s heart. Last fall her son was diagnosed with lung cancer, so she has become even *more* active in supporting organizations that provide resources for families impacted by cancer, as well as charities that support cancer research.

The Coveys are part of a nonprofit motorcycle group that organizes rides and rallies to raise money for cancer organizations. This year, James and Rhonda will be organizing a Poker Run, and all the funds will be donated to a family dealing with expenses due to cancer.

Rhonda is a supporter of Safe Passage, an organization that advocates for children and non-offending caregivers who are impacted by sexual or physical abuse (safepassagcac.org). She also serves on The Cutting Edge REALTORS® Agent Council, and contributes time and resources to community projects throughout the year.

She is very proud of her husband, a Marine veteran who served from 1987 to 1991. She is also proud of the veterans and active-duty military members in her family, including her father, uncles and cousins. She desires to bring them honor through her service to military families.



Rhonda is energized by spending time in nature hiking, fishing, and hunting. When she and James are not riding, Rhonda enjoys discovering new and beautiful places in Colorado. They also love spending time with their five children and four grandchildren. And they look forward to meeting their fifth grandchild soon.

**Still Evolving**

She finds great value in collaboration with agents and preferred partners. She is especially grateful for her teammate, Ariel Waite, who has contributed to Rhonda’s ability to remain positive no matter what. As leader of The Covey Properties Team, Rhonda has been focused on redeveloping herself and her business and has recently earned her Qualifying Broker license in New Mexico.

“I have learned to see through the worst parts of life and remain positive and focused,” Rhonda noted. “I ask myself, ‘What lesson or tool can I take away from this?’ And I set goals to conquer and surround myself with better, smarter people. When I embrace the success of others, I can learn even more! It’s not about how many deals I can close, it’s about how many people can I serve. How can we help each other live the life of our dreams? I know without a doubt that no matter what obstacles life throws my way, I can always start over and experience success!”

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# 5 STAR

▶▶ partner spotlight

## Moving & Storage, Inc.

*Melysa Benedict* | Written by **Brian Gowdy & Melysa Benedict**  
Casa Bay Photography

Melysa Benedict was nineteen years old when she walked into the storefront that would change her life. Selling glass-framed motivational posters business to business, she found herself in front of a sales manager for a moving company. The sales manager was so impressed with her pitch that she offered Melysa a job. “I went from making cash under the table to a “real job” making \$500/week,” Melysa says. “It was like winning the lottery!” And so, Melysa got her start in the moving industry.

But, like so often in life things get worse before they get better. “Six months into my new job, I was addicted to heroin.” Melysa admits she would run home during her lunch break to get high. Not long after, she was living under a bridge in downtown Denver. “This was a serious low point”, she says. In desperation to get clean, she packed up and moved to Florida. Two weeks into sobriety,

and only twenty-two years old, she found herself pregnant. “That was all the motivation I needed to stay clean.”

Stitch by stitch, Melysa’s life started to sew back together. “It was a true struggle being in active recovery and back at ground zero and supporting a child alone. To get to work from my new place, I would have to take a two-hour bus ride and ride my bike the rest of the way when I was 6 months pregnant. But that’s what I had to do as a single mother.”

Well into her continuing recovery, and her fourth year at the moving company, the sales manager who had hired her invited Melysa to help her start a brand-new moving company. Melysa agreed and shortly after found herself running the entire company. In early 2007, they were expanding and Melysa moved from Denver to “a strange new land” to launch their Colorado Springs division. “In the year it took me to get it up and running, I realized that I should be doing this myself,” she says.

On May 14th, 2007, Melysa launched her very own company, 5 Star Moving & Storage, focused on local moves within Colorado. “Starting a company on my own was scary, but I had worked for other moving companies and basically had run one all on my own. I knew I could do it.” And when the company she had left shut down after less than a year after her leaving, Melysa knew she had done the right thing.

5 Star Moving & Storage got its start in a studio office above Meadow Muffins (now Mother Muffs) in Old Colorado City with nothing but a start-up loan of \$12,000.00, a laptop and a folding table. She leased a box truck, and parked it over at a 1,000 square-foot warehouse across from the old Bear Creek Lanes off Highway 24 and 21st st.

Things clicked gradually. In 2012, an associate in the industry opened a division in Colorado Springs, offering to split a 10,000 square-foot. warehouse with 5 Star. The other company primarily focused on military moves, something Melysa wasn’t versed in. Working alongside them, she learned their systems and, when they eventually closed down their Colorado Springs office, she took over their clients and contracts.

5 Star had operated as an independent local moving company since their inception. Another associate in the industry had brought up the

idea of her becoming an agent with Arpin Van Lines, a 130 year-old, multi-generational, Family-owned Van Line headquartered in Rhode Island. Coincidentally, there was an Arpin-branded trailer parked in front of her warehouse that had been sitting there for a while. Taking the initiative, Melysa called Arpin’s corporate office to let them know about the trailer. The call led to a meeting; the meeting led to a dinner; and the dinner led to 5 Star Moving & Storage becoming part of the Arpin Van Line family. After joining Arpin, 5 Star gradually expanded into the warehouse next door where they currently operate out of 20,000 square feet of space. 5 Star Moving now services local, interstate, military and International moves to date.

“Joining Arpin was what lifted the ceiling for me,” Melysa says. “Up until then, I had to learn everything on my own through trial and error.” Arpin had 150 other agencies across the nation and they collaborate, sharing their knowledge and support. “No one can grow when you keep things close to the chest. You won’t ever become something more that way.” It should be noted that a Van Line’s “agents”



are still 90% Family-owned and operated independent companies who represent and operate their long-distance moves. Melysa clarifies, “A van line and the local agency is a copacetic relationship that brings national recognition for the smaller Family-owned company, and brings a local presence to the national van line. There is no change of ownership, nor is this a franchise. This business model keeps our small brick and mortar businesses where they should be: supporting our local economy with jobs, community building, and local culture”

In March of 2020, Wheaton Van Lines purchased Arpin Van Lines. 5 Star was one of only 50% of the Arpin agents that were invited to join Wheaton Van Lines after the merger. At first, Melysa was skeptical, concerned she would lose her “Arpin family” but it turned out to be nothing of the case. “Wheaton is a fantastic company with the same values and expert support. The merger has filled in some important gaps, enabling us to serve our clients at an even higher level of quality.

The past three years have been pivotal for 5 Star Moving and Storage. “During the pandemic, the military work dried up overnight. It gave us time to plan and to adjust our scope of services. 5 Star gave its major focus back to local clientele, including delivery and storage for interior designers, restaurants, large commercial distributors in need of local delivery services, custom home builders, among other lines of business. “Anything to keep our doors open, and our crew members working and supporting their families,” Melysa explains. “I thought about what was most important to me as an owner, as well as what I wanted 5 Star to become”. I’m proud to admit that we didn’t have to let anyone go during the shutdown. And now that we are moving past the pandemic, the lines of business that we went after have stayed, and increased our footprint of services.”

Lots of industries have faced challenges hiring employees post-2020. “I put a lot of focus on training new employees and retaining current ones. The moving industry is challenging; it is a *skilled* labor.

But the trouble is, that many people do not understand it or give it the effort or recognition that it deserves. Finding reliable employees who WANT to work hard is difficult, so creating an environment where they are recognized and fulfilled and continue to show up is essential." Melysa's goal over the next two years is to continue growing as well as to elevate the culture in her business so that her team is even more committed." I want the guys coming into your home to feel like your family for the day. And a good way to make that happen, is that they feel they are part of mine first," says Melysa. "The moving industry saved me and gave me something to strive for. This industry understands second chances, and it is a big way I give back in my recovery, knowing that I can offer that chance to others as well", she says.



There is a lot that separates 5 Star Moving & Storage. "We've been open for over sixteen years," Melysa says. "But we still own five trucks and a semi-tractor. I will be the first to tell you that I do not want to be a company that makes their dollars by "quantity." We are a smaller organization, that caters to lovers of a "niche" experience. And to do that, we spend more time on each client. You can expect a noticeable difference in customer focus between us and a company that has twelve trucks and five semi-tractors..."

"We consider ourselves to be a 'boutique mover.' Our ideal client is someone who isn't looking for the cheapest price; rather, they are looking for the best service. Our ideal clients aren't pre-packing their goods to save a buck; they value their time more than money and they allow us to do the job they're hiring us for."

5 Star's value proposition to their Realtor partners is to help make their transactions even smoother and give them the ability to offer more value to their clients. "Your clients are juggling so much already. Let us save them time, energy, and multiple headaches by orchestrating their moving and storage needs." One of her favorite programs is working

closely with real estate agents and their preferred Title companies to assist the client in packaging their moving services with the rest of their home-buying experience. "I enjoy spending time with our community REALTORS to discuss how to make their clients transition just a little bit easier," Melysa says.

What Melysa loves the most about working in the moving industry is that it's a new story every day. "There are so many pieces to the moving process. To me, there is something incredibly satisfying about taking something with 100 steps, orchestrating it from start to finish, and completing each step smoothly. Especially when you are involved in someone's exciting journey into a new phase of their life, whether it is across town, the country, or the world." And in an industry that works so closely with customers in a very emotional and complicated time, there is ALWAYS a way we are growing, changing, and becoming a better company to serve our clients," Melysa explains.

Outside of work, Melysa has a wonderful extended family. Along with her 20-year-old daughter, Fae, "who literally saved my life," Melysa chuckles, she has an amazingly supportive boyfriend, Justin, of 6 years, along with his children, Blake (18) and Sierra (13). And she loves horses! She has owned her horse since he was two days old. "That horse is my heart and soul; among so many other things, he teaches me how to communicate without talking." He probably is one of my best instructors on how to take care of customers and show them I care." Melysa also loves golf, traveling, and scotch; "Preferably all together," she says with a smile.

**“ I want the guys coming into your home to feel like your family for the day. And a good way to make that happen is that they feel they are part of mine first. ”**

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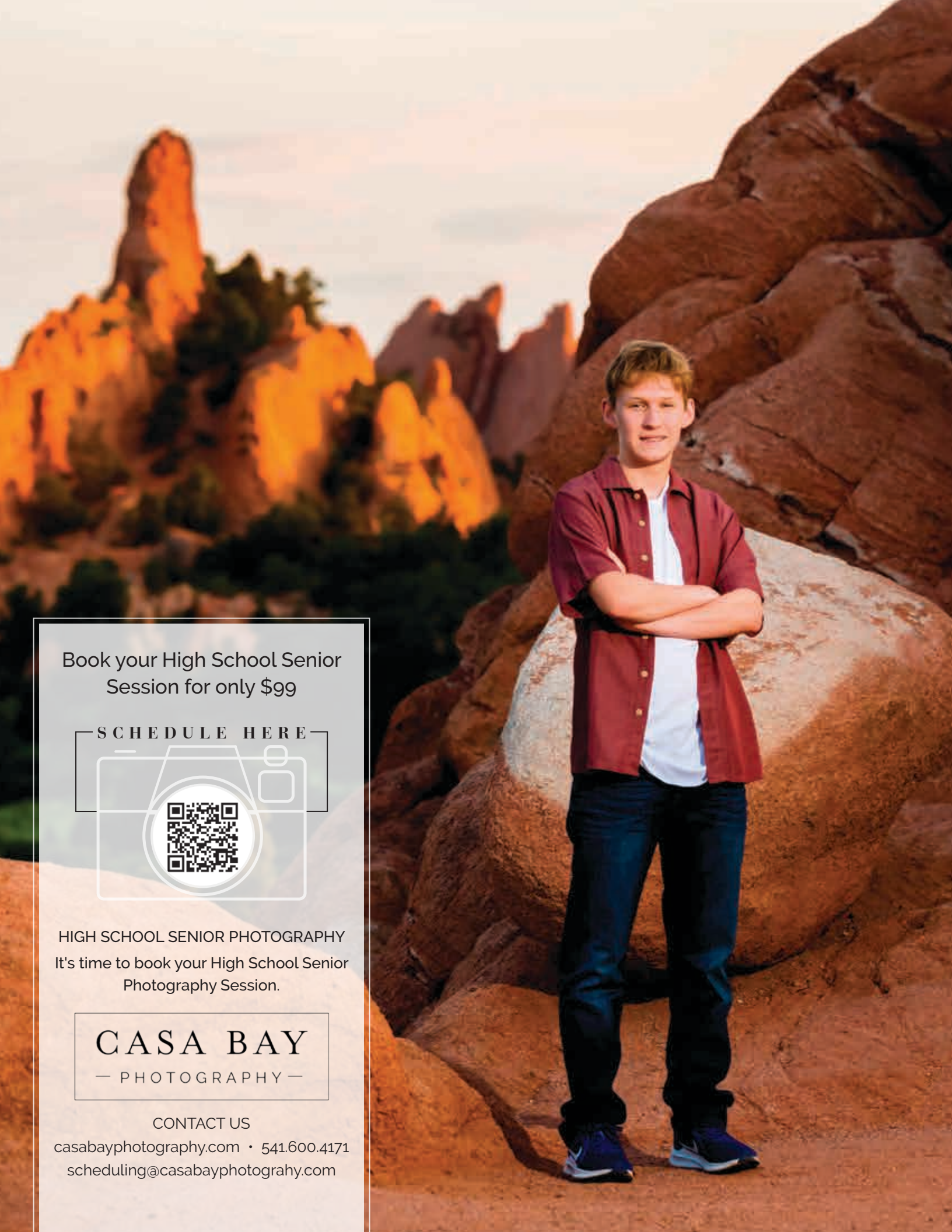
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Written by Ruth Gnirk  
Casa Bay Photography

# JASON LYMAN

## PROVIDING AN EXCEPTIONAL EXPERIENCE

### LIFE LESSONS

Jason learned to be adaptable and go with the flow from a young age. He was born and raised in Denver, but when he was in third grade there was a change in his family circumstance and his mother, Candace, moved to a suburb of Dayton, Ohio.

Candace Reeves was a career Air Force contractor. She encouraged Jason to get involved in Civil Air Patrol, where he learned about discipline and character. Jason's life lessons on adaptability continued for about five years as he split his time between his mom in Ohio, and his dad, Gary Lyman, in southern California. Jason attended different schools each year. When he was in eighth grade he moved back in with his mom and stayed with her until he graduated from high school.

Jason's first "real job" (besides having a paper route) was working as a dishwasher at a local barbeque place. One day he wore neon pants to work, rather than uniform pants, and his supervisor asked him to go home

and change. Teenaged Jason went home and did not plan to go back to finish the shift. In fact, he decided that he was going to quit. However, when his mom heard about his plan, she told him that if he wanted to resign, he had to do it the right way, by giving a proper two week notice, and working every shift that he was assigned, in uniform, starting that very day. Jason ended up working there for the rest of the year.

"My mom was a huge influence in how I approached jobs, and life," reflected Jason. "She always stressed customer service and being professional. And she approached her own life and career that way, too."

Looking back now, he sees the positive side of his busy life. Jason became skilled at talking to new people and making genuine connections. He also learned to truly treasure relationships and loyalty. When he was a sophomore in high school, he met five classmates who became such good friends that they have stayed connected to this day.





### THE DJ

Jason had inherited both of his parents' love for music, and during high school he found a way to express it in a meaningful way. Jason got involved with the school's radio station and even dabbled in video production.

After graduation, he enrolled as a Telecommunications and Audio Production major at Ohio University in the beautiful city of Athens, near the Appalachian Mountains. He served as a rave disc jockey, and also as a radio deejay all five years he was there. He had dedicated morning, afternoon, and evening shows on the all-campus radio network, and they gave him confidence to speak in public.

The summer after graduation he became the assistant manager for a pizza place that he had worked for in high school. After Jason moved to Columbus, a temp agency helped him secure a job as a teller at a local credit union. He progressed to their call center when he was responsible for inbound customer service.

He learned to diffuse situations and was moved to sales and service. Jason became comfortable talking to people and was skilled at finding common points of interest with customers. After working at the legacy bank for a year, Jason accepted a position with a third-party credit call center. He tried his hand at a few other jobs as well. He wanted to find a job that paid the bills and had meaning.

### FRESH START

A new relationship filled him with hopes and dreams, and he tried deejaying in San Francisco. However, a week after his arrival the September 11 attack occurred, and his job fell through. Thankfully he was able to find a sales and customer service job with an orthopedic medical company.

Jason ended up moving back to Ohio and working for the same medical company. He decided to pursue a master's degree so he would have greater career opportunities. Amazingly, he started working for another legacy bank, and they agreed to pay for his MBA.

He was working in the business banking call center, and had to do intentional sales type calls for six



months. Then he was offered an office in The Short North. In less than three months Jason brought them from the lowest-performing to the highest-performing office. He stayed there a year.

Shortly before graduating from Otterbein with his MBA in 2009, Jason was transferred to a bigger office where he did the same thing as a Banking Office Manager.

His mother, the career Air Force contractor, encouraged him to apply for a civil service position in Dayton. He commuted one hour every day for five years and served in acquisition logistics for the first three. In 2012 Jason was placed in the foreign military program where he trained mechanics from Afghanistan in airplane maintenance.

A change in family circumstance prompted him to move. When he was offered a career-broadening assignment in 2014, Jason relocated to Colorado Springs. By 2016 he had received a promotion at the base and needed a house big enough for his two beautiful daughters.

## REAL LIFE

Jason had no idea how much his life was going to change when he met REALTOR® Jeff Pigott at an open house. The two became good friends and enjoyed frequent games of golf. During several games, Jeff encouraged Jason to consider a career change. Jeff knew he would make a good agent.

By 2016 Jason was a licensed REALTOR® on Jeff's team. Jeff modeled, and taught, Jason how to be a professional and knowledgeable agent. The next year, Jason joined The Cutting Edge, Realtors. In 2018 Jason turned in his 30-day notice to the Air Force so he could focus on real estate full time.

His amazing mother passed away in 2019, and by 2021 Jason decided to step out and become an independent agent. He also bought his first cabin, in the mountains, and started remodeling it. It quickly became the second most popular Airbnb in the area. Before the year was over, he bought an A-frame investment property. And in 2022 Jason formed the Lyman Group.

## INVESTING IN PEOPLE

Jason enjoys preparing and serving meals at Marian House on the first Wednesday of each month. And when he participated in a Habitat for Humanity project this past fall, he was able to work side-by-side

with the new homeowners. Jason also serves by leading classes at The Cutting Edge, Realtors, and has been elected to serve a two-year term on the agent council at Cutting Edge.

In honor of his mother who was a long-time supporter of National Public Radio, Jason supports NPR, too. He also believes in the mission of CASA, and is part of the Pike's Peak REALTOR'S® Association.

Although Jason and his fiancé Valerie had gone to college at the time, they didn't meet each other until after they had lived some life and become better people. Their skill sets and life views complement each other. They enjoy standup paddleboarding, hiking, and taking walks with their Welsh terrier "Kiko" (who looks like a teddy bear).

Jason has been an avid and daily CrossFit participant for over a decade and has even entered some competitions. He enjoys making connections at the gym with others who are there to be better than they were yesterday.

He is glad that his daughters get to experience mountains. One of his favorite things about Colorado is snowboarding, and this year some agents from Cutting Edge are going to take a repeat helicopter ski and snowboarding trip to British Columbia, Canada.

“

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# María Bay

## ▶▶ partner spotlight

Written by **Tabby Halsrud**  
Photography by **Casa Bay Photography**

*“We don’t just ‘take’ photos - we ‘make’ photos,” said María Bay. “People think being a professional photographer is as simple as just going to buy a camera and taking some pictures. But, it really doesn’t work like that. Good photography requires skill and practice, which comes with time and effort.”*



▲  
Casa Bay Assistant Studio Manager:  
Tabby Halsrud

CASA BAY PHOTOGRAPHY



Owner: María Bay

*In order to do portrait photography well, Maria said you need technical know-how and ability. “The technical skills such as lighting need to come pretty naturally to you so when you’re with a client, you don’t have to spend a lot of your time focusing on the equipment. You need to be able to focus on the person in front of you – the client has to be the most important person while they are with you.”*

*There is a lot of intentionality behind portrait photography. The photograph tells a story about the client and who they are as an individual, a family, or a business owner, depending on the focus of each photoshoot. As such, the photographer needs to be intentional with where and how they position and pose people, as well as the technical aspects such as composition, color and lighting.*

*Pretty much everyone hates having their photograph taken, so investing time to bond with the client and help them feel comfortable is important to Maria. This has become a cornerstone of how she approaches her work.*

*Maria has fifteen years of experience as a portrait photographer. She is one of the rare ones who blends her love for creative photography with solid business skills. “When you’re an artist, it can be difficult to combine art and business, but my experiences have supported me in being able to do just that.” Her experiences as a translator, English teacher, magazine writer and photo editor, and fine art photographer have helped shape her into the business owner she is today.*

*Casa Bay is your local choice for portrait photography including headshots and branding photos, boudoir images, high school senior pictures, and family photos.*

#### **INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE**

Maria Bay was born and raised in Peru by nurturing and supportive



parents who “always encouraged me to do what makes me happy as long as I do it well.” Maria gained a deep appreciation for cultural differences across the globe while living in different countries. In addition to the United States, Maria has lived in Peru, Brazil, China, and Ukraine. Her time in these countries taught her that beauty and the appreciation of beauty is cultural. After being perceived differently in each country, she learned that no one is beautiful or ugly, everyone just is. “Now as a

photographer, my job is to learn what you love about yourself and figure out how to reflect that to you without bias.”

Maria began her International experiences at the age of fifteen when she traveled to England; that’s when she first began to appreciate cultural differences. While there, she learned that there is no wrong; there’s only different. “I learned that it is not bad to be different; what matters is to be respectful of differences while also focusing on what you have in common.” She loved meeting new people

“**Art is a group sport, not a solitary one. I love connecting with people and working with families and kids. I love it when they come back for more photos in a couple years and I get to see their growth.**”

”



and it wasn’t long before Maria fell in love with the concepts of family and people dynamics and how we show love for each other. This passion is at the core of how she operates her studio today.

Maria participated in an exchange program through the Rotary club, which took her to Brazil. She lived there for a year and learned to speak Portuguese. There, Maria fell in love with photography. When she moved to Arizona to study Psychology, she decided to take a couple of photography classes for fun. The basic photography skills came naturally to her. “It all came so easily and just made sense to me. My teacher recommended I pursue it further and it wasn’t until later that I decided to do so.” Maria started doing photography full-time when she moved to China.

#### **CULTIVATING EXPERTISE**

Maria said that the move to China changed her life’s direction and her ideas about what she wanted to do. While there, she took a distance professional photography course. She didn’t just want to learn how to take pictures, she wanted to learn more specific technical skills and increase her understanding of how to best use a camera.

Her photography career started with events and headshots. She worked for a magazine and quickly learned that the employee/ employer mentality is very different in China than it is here. She would get a text with some basic information such as date, time, and address and had to show up ready to produce usable, printable, high-quality work without knowing anything about the conditions in advance.

To be featured in the magazine paid well, but she had to produce something worthy of being featured in order to be paid. “I got good quick. I had to learn how not to fail; for me, there was no option to fail; I had to produce. It was high pressure, high stakes, unpredictable, and always changing. But these are the things that hooked me.” She calls those years her “photography boot camp.”

Maria joked about her first published photo only being 1 1/2 x 1 inches, because it was so bad. She watched other photographers come in, have small photos published, get paid very little, and leave. They chose to fail and to walk away. Not Maria. “I knew my photos weren’t good enough. I knew that if I wanted bigger features, I needed to get better. I started taking more online courses and reading photography books. I read about posing, lenses, the nuances of lighting for both indoor and outdoor shoots, and how to help the client feel comfortable.”

As she improved her skills, Maria got more features and ultimately, started to get covers. When she needed to, she would take responsibility for her mistakes and reshoot. "My editor started trusting me and respecting me more for owning and correcting my mistakes, and eventually, he let me do the photo editing and choose the photos for the magazine." That three years didn't pay much, but through her experiences, Maria built her skills and expertise and started to discover which styles of photography she liked best.

When Maria moved to Ukraine, she wanted to do boudoir photography and fell in love with the idea of building a studio. Boudoir motivated Maria to challenge herself even more because it's the hardest style in terms of posing and lighting. "You have to be really good to produce good work. You're capturing photos of people who feel vulnerable and don't believe they are good enough or beautiful enough to be photographed in that way. You have to know how to accentuate what they love about themselves and reflect their beauty to them."

While in Ukraine, Maria assisted with lighting on shoots with various magazines, helped translate with the Brazilian models, and photographed models too. She learned about beauty, makeup, clothes and fashion. She learned from other photographers about how to make photos look high-end and classy-sexy rather than "raunchy" or overly sexual through styling, lighting and posing. She also started to discover her own personal style.

When Maria moved to Boston, she focused on Fine Art photography with an emphasis on posing and beautiful effects. She was successful with this style, but found it boring. She wanted to spend more time with people and less time alone in a room making "art." To Maria, "art is a group sport, not a solitary one. I love connecting with people and working with families and kids. I love it when they come back for more photos in a couple years and I get to see their growth."

By the time Maria and Casa Bay moved to Oregon, she had solidified her photography loves: working with families, boudoir, and headshots. After three years in Oregon, Maria and Casa Bay Photography moved to Colorado Springs.

Maria believes in the importance of giving back, and regularly donates a portion of her revenue to different causes, such as orphanages. Recently, she's begun donating a portion of all boudoir revenue to an organization which provides resources to women running away from abusive relationships in Peru. She also gives back by hiring people to teach women important life skills such as how to use a computer, baking, or sewing.

#### **SPECIALIZED SERVICES**

There is a huge difference between a solitary photographer and a photography studio. At Casa Bay, Maria works alongside her newly hired Assistant Studio Manager to provide exceptional service to clients. "Photography is scary for people and it's really important for us to take time to help our clients feel comfortable. We learn about them and what they want to capture in their images so we can intentionally create images that represent who they are. We help put them at ease and help them prepare for their session. We focus on the details, including who will be in the photos, how to prepare the kids, and what everyone will wear. We mediate client concerns and help resolve pain points and problems as they arise."

Casa Bay recently hired an Assistant Studio Manager, Tabby Halsrud, who helps with client care, scheduling, social media, and other important studio tasks. "I know what I don't do well and I've learned how important it is to ask for help. I've known Tabby for five years and having her here working alongside me allows me to focus on the creative aspects including creating and editing images and selling products. With Tabby here, we are providing a higher level of service so our clients feel seen, heard, and understood and we can handle more volume."

As an entrepreneur herself, Tabby understands the importance of building relationships, focusing on the client experience, and continually improving the process. Tabby is active in the networking community and well-connected with other entrepreneurs and business owners.

#### **CREATING CONNECTIONS**

"The reason I love photography is because it allows me to be my crazy self while I set my own rules and travel the world. I get to decide how good I'm going to be and how far I'm going to



“  
**The reason I love photography is because it allows me to be my crazy self while I set my own rules and travel the world.**  
”

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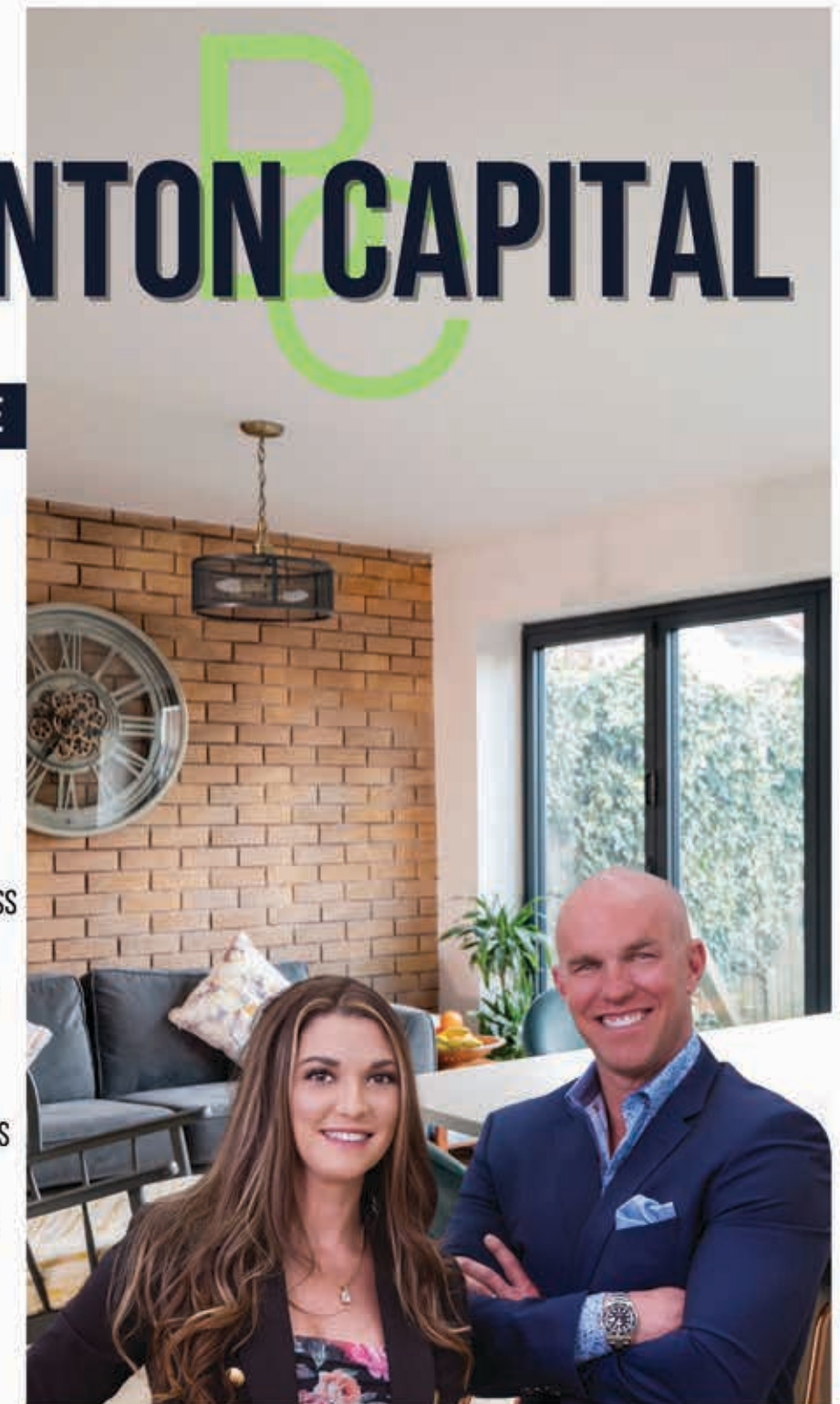
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# JENNIFER

Written by **Ruth Gnirk**  
By Photography by  
**Heidi Mossman of Capture  
Life Photography**

# A PASSION FOR PEOPLE **DION**

*Jennifer Dion learned to value life, and home, at a young age. She helped with her first home remodel when she was only eight, and became a REALTOR® in her early twenties. She is proud to be the mother of a son with specialized needs, and is constantly motivated to work hard for him. Jennifer has learned invaluable lessons from each “setback” she experienced and has transformed them into a setup for success.*

#### **TAKE NOTHING FOR GRANTED**

Jennifer Dion was born at Malmstrom Air Force Base in Montana. When she was five her father passed away and her mother, Carolyn, became a single mom of three at age 36. Three short years later, their family home was destroyed in a fire. Jennifer saw her courageous mother grieve her losses while carrying on for her children.

Carolyn moved her family into a rental home that belonged to a friend and tried to wait patiently for the general contractor to finish re-building their house. Time was passing, but the work was not progressing quickly enough for Carolyn. However, rather than complain, she decided to roll up her sleeves and do something about it.

The year was 1978, and there were no TikTok’s or YouTube videos with step-by-step instructions for installing drywall, tile, or insulation...so she checked out books from the library and learned how to do those things herself. Jennifer was fascinated by the process, and helped her mother with each new project she undertook. Their house was completed in eight months.

#### **A NEW EXPERIENCE**

In 1982 the family listed their house, in preparation for a move to Colorado Springs. Jennifer’s brothers were great at helping outdoors, but the house was her “realm.” As a 12-year-old she genuinely enjoyed preparing the house for showings and took the job very seriously.

Seeing her interest in real estate, Carolyn invited Jennifer to sit in on conversations with their REALTORS® in Montana and Colorado. She involved Jennifer in the entire process, including allowing Jennifer to learn about their financing options.

“My mom was amazing!” reflected Jennifer. “She allowed me to be involved in the listing of our Montana house, and I was fascinated by the entire process. I *loved* open houses! When we moved to The Springs, I was convinced that working for Rawhide Realty was the job of my dreams.”

Over the next five years, Jennifer’s passion for real estate was overshadowed by her desire to become a nurse. When she was 18, Jennifer married her high school sweetheart at the Air Force Academy.

As she was graduating from nursing school, Jennifer found out she was pregnant, and the AF moved their young family



“  
Losing my dad when I was young taught me to value life because time is short.  
”

multiple times. Life seemed to be perfect as a stay-at-home mom. But when their son Jake turned three, he was diagnosed with Autism and Jennifer was suddenly a single mother who needed to provide for a son with special needs. She decided she needed to save her care giving capacity for Jake instead of pursuing the career in nursing.

#### LIVING A NEW DREAM

Thinking back to her youthful dream of being a REALTOR®, Jennifer enrolled in a three-week Coldwell Banker Fast-Track course and became licensed in 1993. On her first official day as a licensed REALTOR®, the new agent was assigned desk duty. A couple stopped in the office and Jennifer began talking with them about their hopes and dreams.

Jennifer remembered how much she had loved the home-buying process when she was a young girl, and she was determined to do her best to help clients love their experience too. As added motivation, Jennifer had speech therapy bills for Jake to pay. Before her first day was over, she had sold the couple a house!

She loved being Jake’s mom. He would come with her to weekend appointments and was a good helper. Although the doctor said he might never speak, Jake started speaking at age six and a half. By the time he was eight, he was like a professional tour guide. He would kindly instruct children to, “zip it, lock it, key in your pocket, hands behind your back and stay in line” while they followed him in an orderly fashion as he showed them the house.

“Losing my dad when I was young taught me to value life because time is short,” reflected Jennifer. “My mother exemplified determination and self-reliance, and when I became a single mother, I tried to follow her example. I did not allow myself to make excuses. The speech therapy bills inspired me to stay diligent in real estate, and they were worth every penny when Jake learned to talk. With each new circumstance that arose, I just acknowledged it and then asked myself how I was going to work through it.”

#### TAKING A BREAK

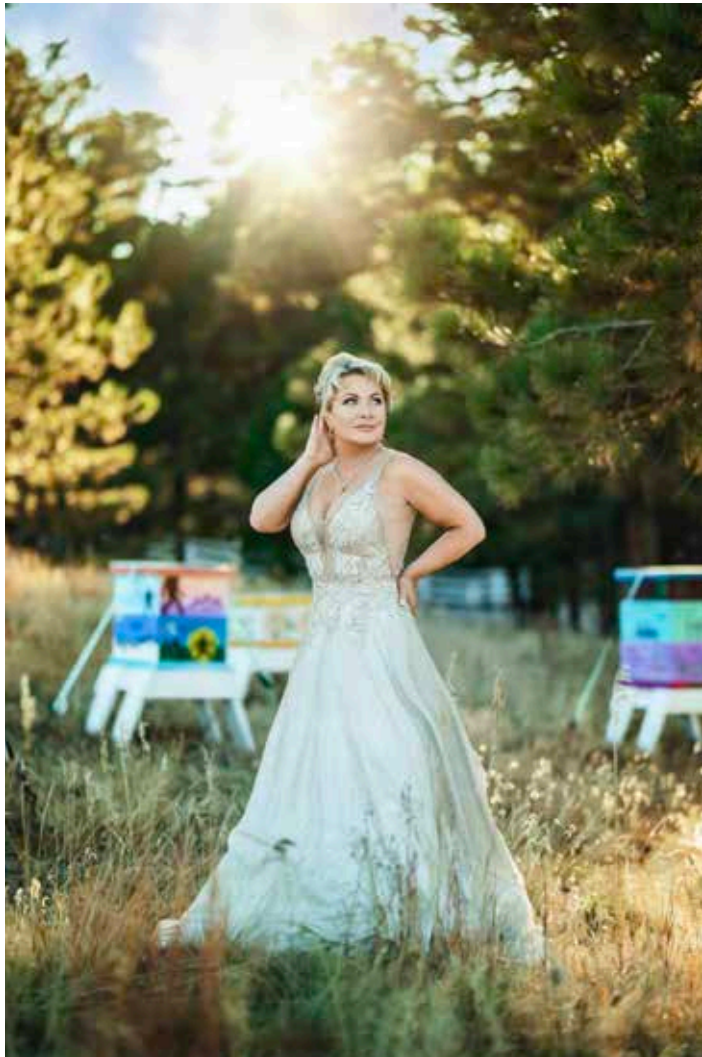
Jennifer was glad for a flexible career. She relocated to Northern Virginia after determining



the schools offered a more inclusive setting for Jake, and she believed she could sell real estate anywhere. In addition to being involved in residential sales, she worked with a luxury custom home builder in Northern Virginia, helping buy and sell property that could be torn down and rebuilt or completely renovated, and managing the design showroom for about six years.

During the course of her real estate experience in the Atlantic Coast, she was assaulted while showing a house in the D.C. area. It was a very traumatizing experience. Although she continued serving others after recovering, she referred business to other agents and began working in the field of defense contracting and compliance. She just could not bring herself to walk into a vacant home.

In 2008 Jennifer and Jake moved back to Colorado at the request of her brother. In 2017, the same brother, who was deployed in the Middle East, asked her to sell his house. There was no reciprocity in Colorado, so she had to retest. She was licensed again as a Colorado REALTOR® in May and was able to serve her brother and a few other clients, all while she completed a proposal for the company bidding to develop the new Air Force Academy Visitors Center in Colorado Springs. By the winter of 2018 she resigned from her defense contracting position and began focusing on real estate full-time.



Meghan Lauren Photography

“When Jake was younger, he loved giving tours and putting stamps on my mailers,” Jennifer shared. “As he got older and was going through school, I found work-life balance and spent quality time with him. When I started helping clients in Colorado Springs in 2017, he saw how much joy it brought me and innocently asked me if I would ‘come out of retirement,’ so he could be my real estate helper again. I’ve come back full force, and I’m now helping about 40 to 50 families each year.”

**LIVING HER PASSION**

Jennifer has had a vast variety of experiences in real estate, including selling houses to high political figures. She is

a Certified Luxury Home Marketing Specialist and a Seniors Real Estate Specialist. Jennifer has a unique understanding of new construction, water resources, and transportation planning and development. She has talked people out of homes when she did not believe it was the best decision for them often saying, “We can do better. Let’s keep looking.”

To honor her father and older brother, who are military veterans, and her younger brother who is currently serving as a Brigadier General in the Army, Jennifer is intentional about giving

“**To me, a home is a home, no matter the cost. I am helping a person or a FAMILY.**”

back to military families. She is also quick to give back to families that include single parents, those providing or needing elder care, and families with special needs. She also supports organizations that serve these families. Jennifer frequently connects clients and community members to resources when they are dealing with memory impairment and disability. [Adult Day Care - Voyages | Goodwill of Colorado ([goodwillcolorado.org](http://goodwillcolorado.org))] She is also a very active member of the Daughters of the American Revolution Kinnikinnik Chapter as Membership Chairman. (Kinnikinnik Chapter, NSDAR - Colorado Springs, Colorado ([coloradodar.org](http://coloradodar.org))).

Jennifer enjoys not only digging into her family’s genealogy, but she and Jake travel to see where family members lived and where they are at rest. They also routinely travel to elephant sanctuaries all over the country, including Oklahoma, Florida, and two in Texas.

Although she has owned a luxurious home just minutes from the White House that she helped to design and renovate - a home that was featured in Southern Living Magazine and the Washingtonian Home and Garden Tour, Jennifer admits that she would choose her 50-year-old Colorado farmhouse in the country over anything else, any day. She and Jake have thriving vegetable and flower gardens, and they have been raising Italian honeybees since 2019. They also host spectacular Murder Mystery dinner parties in their 150-year-old barn.

“REALTORS® can be the bridge for someone to go from renting to owning and others from owning to building wealth through real estate!” Jennifer smiled. “To me, a home is a home, no matter the cost. I am helping a person or a *family*. My clients become part of my extended family, and several have come back to me four and even five times! People call me when they need community connections as well. They even call me to check in on Jake. I look at *everything* from a position of abundance. I love my community and my career, and I am so happy to be home!”



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**Jeanette Hodge** | Account Executive

EMAIL: [jhodge@firstam.com](mailto:jhodge@firstam.com)  
PHONE: 719.246.9074



**Carter Cobbett** | Account Executive

EMAIL: [ccobbett@firstam.com](mailto:ccobbett@firstam.com)  
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