

My Underwater Dogs

by Brooke Mayo



You could say my career as a photographer started with dogs. I've actually had an interest in dogs longer than photography, but a series of dog portraits from my uncle really piqued my interest in capturing dog's moments with a camera.

After studying photography at Appalachian State University and The University of Western Sydney in Australia, I worked with Joyce Tenneson and Lois Greenfield in New York City. Traveling to some of the most fascinating places on earth



allowed me to gain experience and solidify my love of photography. During this time, I also realized my childhood home was a place I wanted to call "home" again, and I moved to the Outer Banks in 2003.

A major part of my photography business in North Carolina is weddings, but it's my "Underwater Dogs" project that truly captures my heart. I consider my style to be sassy and fun, silly and unexpected. I approach my compositions



in most cases as a silent observer of life's simple nuances.

I have a love and admiration for the unconditional acceptance that a dog can share with its owner, or "doggie friend" as I like to call them. I enjoy playing with my own dogs and discovered how their personalities served as entertaining and heart-warming subjects, but it was while my dogs were splashing through the water that the true spirit and freedom of being a dog was apparent.



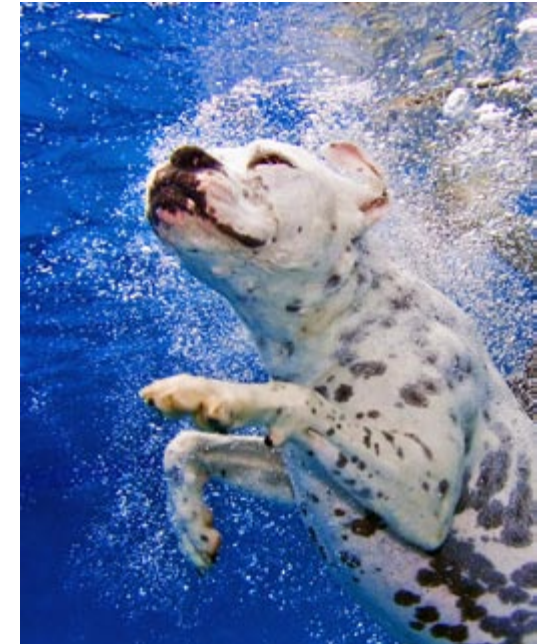
I thrive on the unseen moments underwater – those few precious seconds that are missed observing playtime above water. I discovered that taking my camera below the surface of the water allowed me to explore another world that created so much joy for dogs.

I have always known how happy it makes my dogs to jump in the water after a toy, but I never viewed their expressions and the diligence they use to retrieve something for me. Not only do they love it, but they enjoy it even more because it makes me happy. Dogs want to please, so while diving to the bottom of a pool is super fun for them, they thrive on us being

excited when they bring their toy back.

Most of the dogs I've worked with are quite comfortable in the water, and when they're diving they're so graceful and overjoyed. You can see it in their faces – the way they jump carefree into the pool and dive with their eyes wide open searching for their toy. I love seeing their “jubblys” fly back to reveal their teeth as their tongue curls in the bottom of their mouth.

To capture dogs underwater, I submerge myself with scuba weights and wait for a toy to be thrown in front of the camera. I will start in the shallow end (3-5 feet) and then move



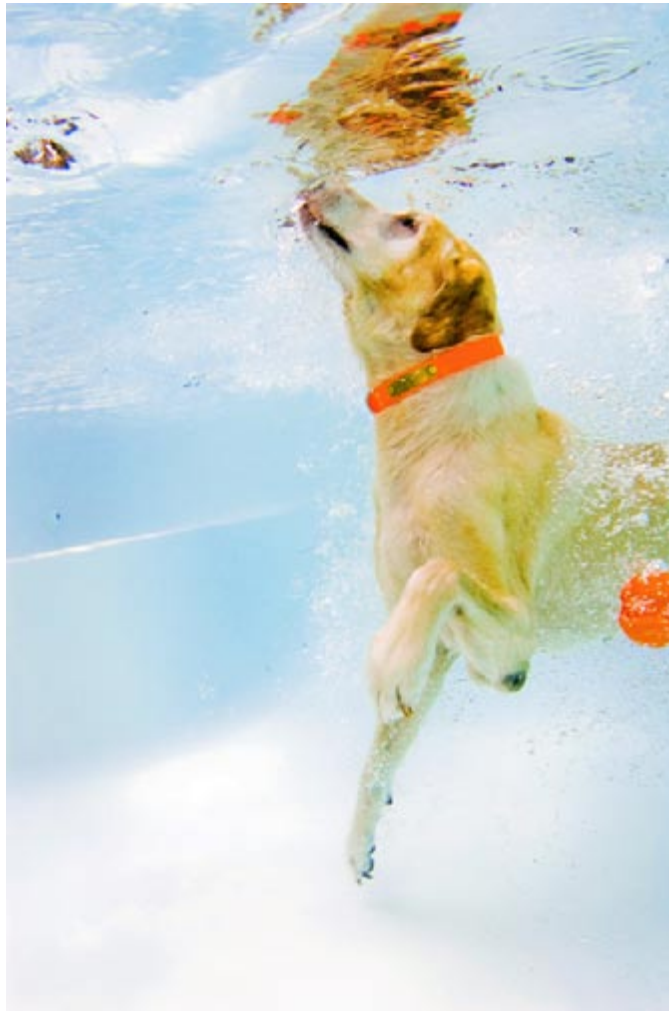


deeper as they get more excited. Sometimes the dogs will do paw-stands on the bottom of the pool completely upside down, it's amazing to watch!!

I set the camera to multiple shots/second and as soon as the dog enters the water, I begin capturing images, 4-5 frames/jump. After several leaps they let me know when it's a wrap. I use a Nikon D200 with an Ikelite housing and one off camera strobe.

I am currently producing an underwater art book called, H2Arf!-Underwater Dogs, which

www.uwpmag.com



documents “diving dogs” at play, from the bottom of the pool or ocean floor and offering destination doggie shoots, traveling around the country photographing all types of dogs at play and underwater.

Combining the best of both worlds, photography and dogs, has allowed me to grow as an artist. Dogs are the best subjects to work with, because they don't hold their emotions; they let you know how they feel. There is a phrase, “To wear

your heart on your sleeve,” and it's usually reserved for people, but I can't help but feel that all dogs are able to display that better than us. We should consider that one of their greater traits.

Brooke Mayo
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Brooke Mayo has been photographing weddings, portraits and dogs for more than six years and is recognized as one of the Outer Banks' leading photojournalists. She is a recipient of The Bride's Book 2008 Readers Choice Award and an award-winning member of WPJA. Brooke Mayo Photography, Inc. has been featured in top wedding publications such as Grace Ormonde's Wedding Style, BRIDES, The Bride's Book, The Knot, Destination Weddings and Honeymoons and Vow.

Mayo lives in North Carolina's Outer Banks with her husband and winemaker John Wright and her dogs Weebler and Biskers.

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