

EPISODE — SHELBY STECKBAUER

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:04.1] ANNOUNCER: Welcome to the Creative Empire Podcast. Each week, Reina Pomeroy, the life and biz success coach and Christina Scalera, the attorney for creatives are taking you up close and personal with successful influencers in the creative community and tackling your biggest business hurdles. Their mission is to help you, creative entrepreneurs, think beyond your daily biz so you can make the brave decisions that build your Creative Empire.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:00:35.6] CS: Welcome back to another episode of the Creative Empire Podcast. Today I am joined by Reina Pomeroy.

[00:00:40.4] RP: Hey there everyone.

[00:00:42.1] CS: And Shelby Steckbauer. Shelby is not only my photographer here in Atlanta but she also is quite an amazing young woman because she's only 24 but she's already accomplished a cross country move with her photography business, bought her own house, and overcome dyslexia. So with all that being said, Shelby hello.

[00:01:01.8] SS: Hello.

[00:01:02.9] CS: How are you doing this morning?

[00:01:04.2] SS: Good, how are you guys?

[00:01:05.3] CS: Good, good. Can you tell us a little bit about how you got into photography, because you have a really good story?

[00:01:13.7] SS: Yes, so I in high school, in middle school, you know, how everyone has a dream job. I never had one. I was like, "I don't know what I'm going to do," and I think a lot of

that had to do with I had dyslexia. A lot of my teachers said I wasn't good enough for anything. I wasn't go to college. I had a vision that I wasn't going to go to college and my parents we're like, "You are going to college." So I just jumped onto a technical college.

I just went for it and I moved about an hour away from my hometown and when I got to college, I just went for marketing. It was really basic and broad and my dad is like, "You could get a lot of jobs with that." So I tried that and about a year I was like, "This is not what I want to do. Marketing is not my thing." So I had a really hard time transferring from my parents' house to college. I lived on my own at the technical college, you didn't get to be in dorms.

So I never got to experience making friends like that but luckily, I had a lot of girlfriends that went to the university in the city that my tech was in and so I met a lot of people through them and my parents, just one Christmas, it was my freshman going into my sophomore year of college, bought me a camera and I was taking pictures during high school and middle school of my dog sitting on the chair and then I have a picture of her with glasses and Harry Potter.

I would take it with just a film camera where it was just click and point and that was it and when I got my camera, that's when Facebook and all the social media was starting to happen and I lived at that time with 10 girls and so they're like, "Can you take pictures of us for our new profile pictures?" So I'm like, "Yeah, sure. I'll give it a shot," and right when I put it on my hands, something weird happened. I knew how to work the buttons.

I was just so focused and driven into learning how to use this camera. I went to seminars, I went to workshops, I switched my major then right after I photographed those girls. I was like, "This is what I want to do. This is exactly what I'm going to do". I don't know if I am going to make a living out of it but this just feels right to me. So switched my degree, I hopped on an internship with a photographer back in Wisconsin and I was learning more than he was.

It was weird. It was like I was teaching my teacher at the time. He's like, "Oh Shelby you just taught me something." So I was just really driven. I've never been driven like that because I was told I was never good enough to do anything. So it really started right in college where I was super like, "This is what I want to do, there's no turning back."

[00:03:38.9] RP: Oh man, thank you so much for sharing that. I feel like a lot of people can relate to just feeling like they're not going to ever make it or whatever and I so appreciate you just talking about that so openly because that must have been really difficult for you.

[00:03:52.5] SS: Yeah it was because you would say, "Oh what are you going to do after college?" and when I said I was going to be a photographer and you can tell they're like, "Oh, okay." I'm like, "No, I'm going to make it work. I'm going to make this full-time," and luckily, in college I got asked to do my first wedding and I was like, "Oh my gosh, okay." So I started shooting weddings in college and so when everyone would go out on weekends, I lived with a bunch of girls. I would drive home to shoot a wedding and they would go out to a party.

I feel like I grew up a lot faster than the average person that was in my grade because right now, everyone is getting out of college and starting their lives and I've been doing that for four years now but it's fun to see. I do miss, I didn't fully get the college experience but I would not take it back for anything because I got to work and pay off my loans while going to college.

[00:04:47.1] RP: That's so interesting and I think a lot of entrepreneurs that I have spoken to who are younger are mature like you and have lived life a little bit more than, you know?

[00:04:56.6] SS: And I think you have to surround yourselves with those people too. Like when I was here, I wanted to surround myself with the older generation that gets me because people my age don't really get how we entrepreneurs work. It's just weird.

[00:05:11.0] RP: Thanks for making me feel like a dinosaur Shelby.

[00:05:13.2] CS: I know, I'm your friend here.

[00:05:15.2] SS: No, that's not what I am saying, like you guys, I surrounded myself with you guys.

[00:05:18.6] RP: The older generation of creative entrepreneurs.

[00:05:21.2] SS: Okay, that sounded probably bad for your audience. That came out totally wrong.

[00:05:25.9] CS: Shelby just knowing you, it's funny because we talk all the time. I always forget that you just turned 24 and I always forget. It's crazy because you are so mature and not an old soul but you're just great.

[00:05:38.7] SS: I'm an old soul. That's fine, I am an old soul.

[00:05:43.0] CS: So after college, what happened? Because you graduated from college in Wisconsin.

[00:05:48.1] SS: Yes, so graduated. I did at Tech and I pushed it to three years because since I switched my major, I missed a lot of the classes I needed to take for business management. That's what I switched to because my dad was like, "You need to learn more of the back end. You have the front end of photography down so let's get you in business management." so I did that and I missed a lot of classes so I pushed it to three years and after that, I graduated. Just something in my gut was like, "You need to do something."

My dad was like, "What do you want to do? Do you want to move home? Do you want to stay in Eau Claire?" Which is where I went to school in Wisconsin and I was like, "Let's just have a year here. I'm going to figure things out." So that year went by where I was just doing photography and I just had a little side job working to just get out of the house and I lived with one of my girlfriends and she was still in college and I was getting really sad and depressed and my mom was like, "You're not happy where you are," and I was like, "I'm not."

I never got to study abroad, I wanted to do stuff I never got to do. I never did the dorm thing and so I'm like, "You know what? I need to change what I'm doing right now because I'm not happy." And back home, this industry is very competitive. I mean I lived in a small town and so there was probably about five or six of us photographers that a lot of couples used. I really like the community over competition and at that time, Tuesdays Together wasn't a thing and still in my home town it's not really. They don't get together.

I think they get together like an hour south of where I lived. I probably have to travel but that wasn't a big deal to me. I really wasn't getting the weddings I wanted. I couldn't see myself just living back home. I really wanted to open up a studio. So I wanted to open up my studio, do the head shot stuff inside, which is where I do my head shots behind me. But I just felt something was off and luckily my parents we're so supportive. They were like, "Move, just do it. You need to do something if you are not happy, we're here to support you."

So I started working down here in Atlanta and it was weird when it happened I was actually, I booked a couple back in Wisconsin and they lived in Atlanta but their family was from Wisconsin. So I came down to Atlanta, did their photo session and then we came back to Wisconsin and did their wedding. It just all spiraled from there. I was like, "I can do this. Maybe Atlanta was my thing, I am just going to go for it."

So I started social media working. I was on Instagram and that's when I hit and met Luisa — it was the perfect timing — from Peaches to Pearls blog. We teamed up and we have been working ever since. So I think we always ask when is our anniversary is and I think it's been over two years and it's just crazy that she honestly has brought my business here tremendously. I always thank her enough for bringing my business here because pretty much all my referrals from when I started here were from her.

[00:08:43.0] CS: Yeah I mean that's how I met you and then from there, that's how Lauren met you.

[00:08:47.9] SS: Exactly, I'm like, "Luisa you're my life saver." So if it wasn't for her, I probably would have moved back home because she was like my best friend around here. I had no one. I moved here, I had my dog that was it. That's what I got. I got a dog and we moved down here. Luckily my parents were just really supportive and months that I was like, "I don't know how I'm going to make it," we made it worked and my dad helps me with my financing.

So he was like, "Okay you can't spend this much on clothes now this month," I was like, "All right." But it worked out in the end. It was a rough year because when you transfer across the US, nobody knows you. Back home, people knew me and I didn't have to market it and I had the word of mouth going. But I used social media to my advantage definitely when I moved and I

suggest to anyone that is moving across the US to use that Instagram to open up to other markets that you had no idea about because that's how it all got started to me was Instagram.

[00:09:44.7] RP: Shelby that's a great point and I think a lot of entrepreneurs who are moving because of their partners or because of their current job or whatever and we've heard a lot of different things. So the first thing is that I think that you are super courageous for just picking up and moving to a different market that you didn't really know anyone and it's very courageous to do that. Because a lot of people do feel stuck where they are but they are not brave enough to move to just pick up their lives and move.

[00:10:08.5] SS: Well luckily, I was at that age. I don't know if I would have done it if I was 30. I really don't. But always in the back of my head I always knew being staying at home just wasn't for me because I was just getting the engagements and weddings. I wasn't getting creatives, I wasn't getting fashion bloggers, I wasn't getting any of that but I didn't know about but I knew was out there and I knew Atlanta would be a city that I could grow in and quicker than normal if I was back home. It just worked out really well.

[00:10:35.4] RP: Yeah, I think it doesn't matter what age you are, a lot of people feel stuck and so the fact that you did it is high fives to you. I was going to ask you about what are some of the biggest tips that you would have? In terms of social media or otherwise, what would you suggest for somebody who is facing a move whether it's when they want to move or they are being forced to move for whatever reason, how do they pick up and prove themselves in a new market?

[00:11:01.5] SS: Sure. So I always suggest, now that there's Tuesdays Together, that's huge. When I moved, there wasn't really the Tuesdays Together yet but when I get inquiries about moving, how do you make the leap? I always suggest getting on social media and just using those hashtags that are, let's just say, someone is moving to Chicago. I always suggest looking up Chicago hashtags, maybe getting in with a couple of photographers there.

I got in with a couple of photographers here. When I moved I started searching and I really found a connection with the few that I still even talk to and work with to this day. But I also suggest getting in with a blogger in that city. That's my number one thing, is I say find a blogger

that fits your style, that has a good following and just offer them a free session. Offer them a session when you get down on there.

See if they want to get coffee, it's not always business. But it is also building those relationships as well and if you hit it off with the right girl, you will just take off and that's I feel like what me and Luisa did. I found that perfect girl, we looked at each other, it was like love at first sight type feel. I was like, "Luisa!" We hang out all the time. It's not even just business, it's also building a friendship out of it and I would pick a friendship obviously over our business.

But I would suggest getting in with a blogger, someone that is looking for exposure too and it might start off where you have to do free sessions. I mean I did do my sessions at a low price. It's like, "Dang, you have to go back to starting from scratch." But if you are driven enough and want to make that move, you just have to sacrifice your financing a little bit just to get yourself started again.

[00:12:40.4] CS: So when you reached out to Luisa or when you reached out to different bloggers, how do you approach them? Because you worked with some pretty cool people. Some people might know Sarah Hopkins, but she's a really big Viner and so for whatever reason, I think it might be actually Kelly's brother, Aaron Tuning lives here too we just have a really vibrant Vine community in Atlanta.

[00:13:00.3] SS: Yes and so when I reached out to Luisa, it was just like, "Hey I am coming to Atlanta for the weekend, I would love to photograph you. I love your style. I think we'd be a great fit for each other," and so when I did that, my e-mail wasn't very professional because I didn't want her to think that I'm all business. But when we got together, I think that's what really sold myself and I think the photographer that is going into a different city or it doesn't have to be a photographer. Maybe an event a coordinator, if you can show your work right then and there, that sells yourself.

But for example, Sarah Hopkins, one of my girlfriends, Haley from H. M. Willow, the bracelets, she was obsessed with Sarah Hopkins and still is and she saw that Sarah moved to Atlanta and I was like, "This is so cool, she's got over two million followers on social media." Her Instagram, she was like 200,000 on there and I was like, "I'm just going to go for it."

Haley was like, “You need to see if you can get a shoot with her,” and I was like, “Okay,” and so I hopped on social media and just messaged her and asked if she wanted to do a shoot. I did it for free but I knew, “Hey, this is an exposure that I could get something out of it.” She gets images and I in return get, she’d post it on her social media. From there, I have gotten seven bookings from her and it was wow, you do a free shoot if it fits you right.

Don’t do it if you don’t think it’s not the right fit but it laid out very perfectly where I was shooting on a fashion bloggers and she looked like she had the fashion in her and she just nailed it. We got to the shoot and she killed it, it was awesome but from her, I was getting referrals then. So I think you need to team up with people that really fit your brand and fit your style and don’t just see if you could get your name out there because I feel like you will lose passion in what you do.

So be very picky about what you chose to say yes and no to when it comes to free but with Sarah, now I’ve built a really good friendship with her and we text and I’m like, “Oh my gosh!” I feel like she is star famous so it’s always fun to see a text message from her. Again, I just built a friendship from it. It’s not like we shoot all the time. We’re shooting next month but I think it’s fun that I built a friendship out of it.

[00:15:10.7] RP: Yeah, I think that that’s such a great point. You weren’t trying to get business out of it, that wasn’t your first intention and I really resonate with that because I think a lot of people would have gone straight for the kill and gone for, “Hey how can you help me? Can I pick your brain?” Which is not the way to go, in my opinion.

[00:15:27.6] SS: I just love shooting. I think if you love shooting and find a girl that looks like would fit your style, that’s what I wanted and I think I just want to keep growing here and that how you grow. It’s just getting out of sometimes your comfort zone. To me, I never would have back home would have been like, “Hey, you want to do a free shoot? Hey, you want to do this?” Or “Hey, do you want to work together?” But when I moved here, that community over competition just really hit me well. I think it was right when Tuesdays Together was starting, I moved here, it was all perfect timing in God’s hands.

[00:15:57.6] RP: Thank you Rising Tide Society forever. I was going to ask you something too, which is that as a photographer especially if you are shooting a lot of weddings, I wouldn't necessarily expect you to go to the fashion bloggers or just bloggers in general and I think that it's really interesting that you went for vendors or people who were outside of that immediate wedding zone and to create a connection with them.

[00:16:21.8] SS: Yeah. Because I ideally, everyone says after a wedding you feel hungover. You feel drained, you feel tired. They are super fun but I only like to do about 12 weddings a year. I want to keep my creativity alive and I love weddings but they can get you a lot. You designate every weekend to them but one thing I loved was the fashion industry was taking off here. Atlanta is the second biggest fashion industry, which is weird. Super weird. But there is this market now, now you get Ponce City Market, they've got Krog Street, there's the Southern Blog Society. So that was another thing.

[00:17:01.4] CS: West Side.

[00:17:01.6] SS: I hopped on the Southern — what did you say?

[00:17:02.8] CS: Luisa's West Side.

[00:17:05.4] SS: Oh yeah, West Side from Vision District too. There is a big market here that nobody really knew about with the fashion bloggers and so once I got on with Luisa, a lot of the Atlanta fashion bloggers were following her and my work sold myself if that makes sense. I didn't have to reach out to many. Luisa was really the one I only reached out to that luckily just was the right click for me and the girls that were following her loved my style and that's how I spiraled that.

I really tried to, I treat my bloggers a little differently than I do my other clients because I work with them every month. So I build a really good friendship too. I mean I do that with my brides and grooms obviously, but it's not the same with my fashion bloggers. I treat them to little promotions throughout the years, I give them discounts for certain things. I will promote them more on my page. It's kind of like you build that friendship as well as a business friendship too.

But it's fun to see each of us grow because I'll shoot a blogger completely different than another blogger the next day. With style, I try not to shoot the same blogger in the same position as another blogger if that makes sense. I won't go to Krog Street and then shoot another one at Krog Street. I like to keep it very different so they feel special and they feel different from everyone else. They don't feel like they are getting compared to other bloggers that I'm photographing. So I really like to pamper my bloggers, as I would say.

[00:18:30.7] RP: I love that. Maybe this is just from experience but what are some of the things that bloggers are looking for that maybe a newer photographer won't even know to offer? What are some things, what are their needs I guess.

[00:18:43.7] SS: What I did was I didn't know fashion at all. I still don't know fashion. I don't dress fashion-y. I am more of a t-shirt, big shirt, big pants kind of girl but I have researched. I was on social media looking at what other fashion bloggers, the photographers they were using. I follow fashion photographers now. I follow what the new trend is. I think being creative, fashion bloggers don't really want just the front shot of their outfit.

They want more in depth, they want to get more details in their photos. Christina could probably vouch for me for this one, I gave her a big variety far away shots but also the close detailed shots that clothing lines want to see. They want to see details in the outfits, maybe not necessarily their head in it but maybe a different angle. I always try to get weird angles, those weird angles are the best angles possible.

[00:19:34.5] RP: Oh I've seen Christina's photos, so yes I can totally attest to your work.

[BREAK]

[00:19:40.2] CS: Do you a business that serves other businesses? We would love to feature you as a sponsor on our podcast. Each week, our episodes reach thousands of listeners and they are hungry and eager for the solutions that you would provide. If you would be interested in advertising with the Creative Empire Podcast, we would love to have you.

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[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[00:20:17.5] SS: Yes, so I just like to give a variety sets you apart too because sometimes, I see that bloggers work with photographers that only give them five images per look whereas I pamper my bloggers and I give them a lot of images. I think that sets me apart too where I am not just giving 10 of this look and 10 of this look. I go above and beyond. I stay up an extra hour just to give them an extra 100 images.

I mean usually bloggers are like, "So with my photographer, I only got 50 images for an hour." I'm like, "Well you're probably going to get over 200 for me," which I need to start backing off just a little but I really want to give them the best experience possible. I really want to give them the best image as possible. It is hard to delete ones that I'm like, "I like that one though, I like that one though." So I think that sets me apart too and even a photographer and going in and wanting to shoot fashion bloggers, just really pamper them. Make them feel special and make them feel, "Okay. They have your back a hundred percent of the time."

[00:21:17.7] CS: I think another way that you pamper your subjects really well is by posing them well because...

[00:21:23.9] SS: Yes, definitely.

[00:21:24.7] CS: ...it's really awkward and I've learned everything I know about posing from you.

[00:21:29.2] RP: And she knows a lot.

[00:21:30.1] SS: Thank you. That was one thing. When I started shooting, I was like, "Wait, I need to tell her to do this angle and then this angle," and I had this vision of other fashion photographers I was following and so when I go into a shoot, bloggers don't necessarily know

what to do. When they get there they are like, “I have no idea what I’m doing. Can you help me?” And I’m like, “Of course.”

So every time I leave a shoot, they’re like, “Wow, you really helped position and make me feel really good about myself.” When they get the images back, they’re like, “Wow I look so good.” But it’s all about the angles and I think a photographer will learn slowly how to position your subject and especially bloggers too because they want to get featured on fashion Instagram’s and everything and I think right now, fashion bloggers are a big part of Instagram.

I mean, LIKEtoKNOW.it, people look for outfits on Instagram now and those bloggers have LIKEtoKNOW.it and if you like a picture that they post, “Oh I have my outfit on [LIKEtoKNOW.it](#),” they get paid when you go to that, LIKEtoKNOW.it page and buy shirt. It’s just that industry right now is so booming that when you move, I suggest anyone that’s moving right now, just hop on that blogger train. That’s all I’ve got to say. Just do it.

[0:22:41.0]RP: Shelby, can you tell us a little bit about your workshop that’s coming up or maybe by the time this airs it will have been in the past?

[0:22:47.4] SS: Yeah, it will be in the past but it’s on the first of October and Christina’s speaking at it. So I’m super excited to have her. But it’s more of Luisa and I were getting a lot of inquiries about how we work together. So we get a lot of girls that are starting out in photography that want to work with bloggers. So it’s nice that Luisa can give a blogger’s perspective and then I can give the photographer’s perspective.

We are trying to teach, this is our fourth workshop and we try to teach, Luisa teaches the social media part. A lot about — we get a mixture. Now we have event coordinators, we have a couple of boutiques coming, we have a couple of photographers, a couple of bloggers, and we have a couple of PR girls coming. We want to educate girls on how to create an ideal clientele. How Luisa says no to certain things and I say no to certain things. We want the girls, that are just starting out, how to do hashtags, how to take really good Instagram photos.

We give the girls a flat lay white box sheet and then we’ll teach them how to use the flat lay with their cameras, and if they don’t have a camera, we’ll teach them how to do with their iPhones.

But a lot of people that are coming want to learn just the basics about photography. We'll be doing a styled shoot with Chancy Charm. That's so cool, I love her. Just how to get published, we want to teach them how to get published, how to get out there more in the industry, getting together with the Tuesdays together group.

Just like an — honestly it's going to be a two day styled shoot galore at a farm and they get free head shots. It's just like a low key workshop that we just want to educate them more about how to be better at what they're doing and just creating a big community. We have a Facebook group with our workshop and all the girls still talk on it and just share their high and low's for the day and it's really fun seeing girls grow from it.

We had on our first workshop, we had a girl that now is at 50,000 followers. I mean, we're like, "Girl! You are working it." She took everything she learned from our workshop back home and she's just killing it now. It's really cool to see a lot of the girls that are attending our workshop growing tremendously, it's really cool.

[0:24:53.8] CS: Yeah, I like your workshop a lot because I've been sitting here thinking about what it is as you're talking but I can't put my finger on it, it's different. I've been to a lot of workshops and conferences and I don't know if it's the fact that you and Luisa are so involved but it just is really different and I was able to attend and speak at the one you guys did earlier this year as well and it was just so practical and you guys were so freely giving of yourselves and your timing and your knowledge, which was a little bit different.

I think maybe it was the format or something but I like the way that you cultivated that and I think it speaks a lot to your past and what you've gone through to get to where you are and how you just want to help everybody avoid all those...

[0:25:35.3] SS: I know, I'm like, "Come in, I want to teach, I want to teach." But the beauty of it, I mean, I get to meet creatives this year and teach them h what I do and I think it's really cool to see them grow then after. But I don't even know how to put our workshop into like words because there's just so many things. We have a styled shoot, then they get head shots and we work with vendors all over Atlanta. They get exposure, we give them images from the day, we

kind of do like a tradeoff and it's just really cool to see everything come together on the day of and just see all the Atlanta creatives that are building a beautiful styled shoot, it's just really cool.

[0:26:12.6] CS: So for anybody who is interested, it's called The Pretty Peach Workshop. Shelby, just in wrapping up here, I'm curious to know, if you had one piece of advice for someone who is looking to start a business and maybe even of an empire one day, what advice would you give them if you just had one little tip to give them?

[0:26:28.7] SS: I would just say, "Don't give up." I have wanted to give up. When you look through social media and you're like, "Gosh, I'm never going to be like that." You always put yourself in someone else's Instagram feed if that makes sense. Always looking and just getting down on myself, don't do that. I just say don't give up and just keep building relationships with people. That is the number one thing I think, once you do that, you will start realizing that just keep going.

Some months are going to be hard, definitely. I think that is what happens when you are business owner. Things get rough, it's not always smooth sailing and so when you get in those moods where you're like, "I can't do this anymore," you have to get over that hump of keep going and I think surrounding yourself with people that encourage you to keep going, helps tremendously.

[0:27:15.3] CS: Thanks Shelby. Where can everyone find you on the internet?

[0:27:18.2] SS: They can find me at Shelby Rae Photographs and that's my Facebook link too and my social media and Instagram and Twitter, but I don't really use twitter.

[0:27:28.0] CS: You guys can follow her dog too who has more followers than I do.

[0:27:31.3] SS: Which is like catching up to me. I'm like, "What the heck Lola?" But that's @misslathethegoldendoodle. She was on Madewell Magazine, I'm like, "Girl, what the heck? Madewell? Really? Gosh." I'm like, "Can't I be in Madewell?"

[0:27:45.7] CS: Thank you so much for coming on Shelby, it was so great to talk to you and I'm surprised we didn't have any Lola bombs during the interview but...

[0:27:51.9] SS: I know, she's hiding. She knows there's nothing going on.

[0:27:56.0] CS: Well, I hope that was encouraging for everybody else out there and I hope you guys took away some great feedback and some great advice, you guys can go out there and build your empires today.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:28:06.2] ANNOUNCER: Are you ready to build your own empire? For more information, show notes, downloads, and tips on how to do it head to www.creativeempire.co where you can find out more about this week's episode and the two lovely ladies behind it all, encouraging you to build your own creative empire.

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[END]