



Equestrian IMAGES

By Wylie Bell • Photos by Dwain and Daniela Snyder, Equestrian Images



Horses are the image of power, beauty, grace, nobility and freedom. That is what Dwain and Daniela Snyder hope to capture every time Dwain picks up a camera and Daniela opens the resulting image in her digital darkroom. Based in Charlotte, NC, the husband and wife are the owners and operators of Equestrian Images, a free-lance photography business that specializes in fine art and conceptual equine photography, but is certainly not limited to horses or photography. Dwain is the photographer, a skill he has honed for more than 30 years, and Daniela brings the artistic eye and creativity that completes all their photography projects. In addition to photographing, Daniela also creates stunning websites and ads, assists with branding and marketing campaigns and more.

Born in Munich, Germany, the daughter of a filmmaker, Daniela came to the United States in 1989. She and Dwain met in 1997 and married a year later. Sharing a mutual love of animals and photography, they started Equestrian Images in 2003 to document animal cruelty and neglect, both in the horse world and at the local animal shelters. The Snyders documented abuse by horse riders of all disciplines for a Canadian magazine called Horses for Life.

"We soon began taking photos for various horse rescue groups. We never intended to turn our photography into a business, but that is how it has evolved," Daniela said. "People kept asking us to cover many events throughout the Southeast as well as many private shoots." In 2005, they did their first private shoot at Pat and Linda Parelli's barn in Ocala, FL. "We were on pins and needles that entire week before the shoot because we were so new at this that we really didn't know what we were doing!" Daniela said. Years later, the Snyders began a new adventure that put them on the swampy river banks of the Great Pee Dee River in Society Hill, SC, capturing the rugged spirit of a rare breed of horse called a Marsh Tackey.

"The Equus Survival Trust had learned of our mission to help horses in need, and they asked us to photograph Marsh Tackies to help raise awareness for this critically endangered breed indigenous to South Carolina," Daniela said. "At that time, there were very few photos of these Spanish Colonial horses, and the breed wasn't widely known beyond the Lowcountry."

"They hooked up with David Grant to take photos of his growing herd of Marsh Tackies in Florence, SC, but this was no ordinary farm call. Grant was a hunter and he wanted his horses to be captured doing their job: chasing wild hogs through the briar-infested swamps with a pack of Pee Dee game dogs at their heels.

"Dwain looked like he had been through a meat grinder climbing through briars and brush trying to keep up with the action of the hunt," Daniela said. "But we both fell in love with the breed's courage and spirit. We were also fascinated by the key role Tackies played during the Revolutionary War as the mounts of General Francis Marion's militia men. The history, legend and survival of the Marsh Tackey has made it one of the toughest horses we've ever met."

Dwain and Daniela soon formed a partnership with Grant, and their photos have been used widely by his outfit, Carolina Marsh Tackey Outdoors, as well as his South Carolina-based equine television show, Horse Tales. Around that time, the couple also started doing volunteer work for Carolina Equine Rescue & Assistance (CERA) – a non-profit horse rescue organization based in Wingate, NC.

Because of the unique beauty of his images, Dwain's photography skills have been tapped by notable publications such as Equine Journal, Horse Illustrated, Horse & Rider, and SC Wildlife. Many of his images are distributed world-wide. The couple has taken on a number of apprentices over the years and tries to teach an equine photography workshop at least once a year.

Daniela has always had a strong connection to horses because of her background in dressage. For Dwain, his Native American roots give him an uncanny ability to communicate with horses. While he has ridden a few times, Dwain feels more comfortable being on the same level with horses rather than on top of them.

"Dwain has touched horses that would not let any male touch them, and he has calmed the most frantic horses," Daniela said. "For me, I ride to get away from all the stresses of life, to feel free. That is what we try to capture in our photos – that mystical, elegant freedom that surrounds the horse."

To learn more about Equestrian Images, visit www.equestrianimages.us and www.snydersquestrian.com. If you are interested in learning more about the Marsh Tackey breed, visit www.carolinamarshstakey.com. Horse Tales TV can be seen at www.horsetalestv.com and if you would like to donate time or funds to CERA, visit them at www.cera-inc.com.