

In The Picture

Story by James Broadhurst

Cheryl Isaac was just ten years old when she first realised what she wanted to do in life. As she watched an artist put the finishing touches on the portrait of one of her family's champion afghan hounds, she decided she too wanted to be an artist. The daughter of well-known trainer Lexia Isaac, Cheryl has divided her time between her two great loves; art and greyhound racing.

I SAAC HAS ALWAYS been involved with canines in one way or another. Originally from Bendigo, her family ran a successful boarding kennel and Isaac remembers her childhood was spent showing dogs, mainly afghan hounds.

The family decided to move to Western Australia when Isaac was 15 after holidaying over here and falling in love with the place.

Upon returning to Victoria they immediately put their home and business on the market.

"I think Mum was a bit shocked when everything sold within two weeks."

It was after arriving in the state that the Isaacs developed an interest in greyhound racing.

"Mum bought a share in a dog," Isaac recalls. "It won its first race and things just took off from there."

Switching to greyhounds proved to be a revelation.

As opposed to showing afghans, all of a sudden they were earning prize-money as a reward for their efforts.

Isaac says that there had been plenty of times when they had been up all night grooming a dog for a show and then it would rain the next day, soaking the dog and ruining all their work.

"I remember thinking, 'what had we doing all that time, all that work for a ribbon!'"

Their experience in the competitive world of dog showing had given them an advantage when it came to breaking into the racing industry.

"Being around dogs all our lives, the transition (to greyhound racing) seemed very natural," Isaac says.

Isaac describes the afghan as a "hairy greyhound"

While the length of time spent working on a piece varies according to the project, Isaac says a painting such as Sandi's Me Mum illustration could take as long as 50 or 60 hours



with striking similarities between the two breeds.

"Afghans, like greyhounds, are sight hounds, that is they hunt primarily by vision."

Eventually Isaac established a small kennel of her own and her first greyhound



Minstrel Song won a few races for her.

Her training days were limited however by the growing demands for her work.

While Isaac still holds a license, these days she prefers to leave the training to "the expert", her mum.

She still has owner interest in several dogs and

occasionally helps in the recuperation of her mother's dogs.

But it has been her art that has kept Isaac the most occupied.

From high school, Isaac went straight into a three-year commercial art course at Perth Tech.

It was there that she discovered that she had a “bit of a talent” for drawing and those who went to school to learn the basics were a fair way behind the naturally gifted.

Being known in the greyhound industry assisted her in getting work and provided an opportunity to combine her two interests.

Most readers would be familiar with the painting of champion greyhound Sandi's Me Mum that hangs in the member's lounge at the Cannington track, but that is only one of many pieces she has completed over the years.

When commissioned to illustrate a greyhound, Isaac likes to meet with the animal first to “get an idea of its character”.

“I also take heaps of photos. Greyhounds get bored easily and don't like to stay still for very long.”

She says head studies are the most popular type of picture she's asked to do probably because most owners already have wining photos and are on the lookout for something different.

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Isaac does not balk at the arduousness of the task as it is part of the process she calls the “strive for perfection”.

As an artist she feels that she has developed since she first started out and has moved more into oil painting rather than pencil work, as well as adding new skills like photography and computer graphics to her repertoire.

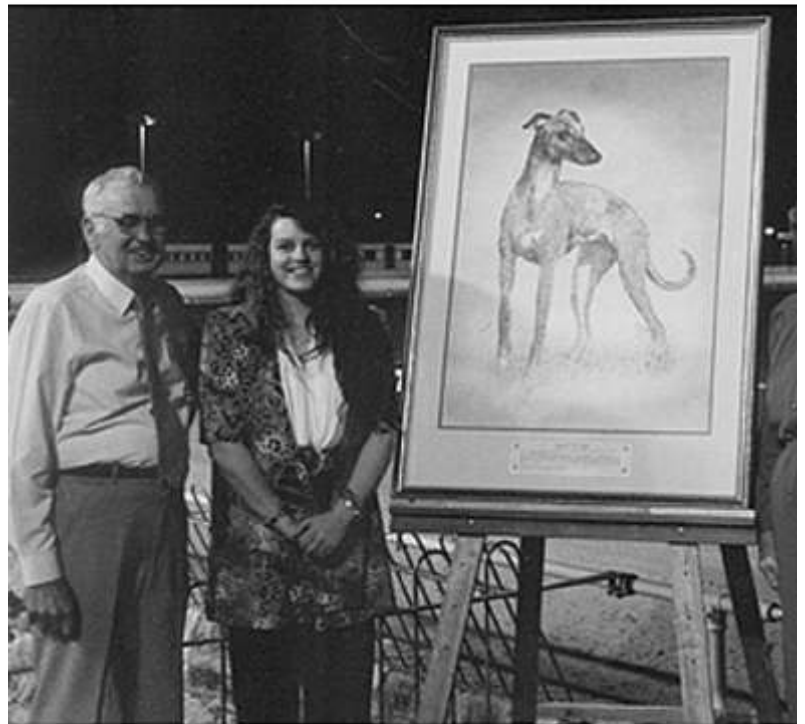
In recent times the demands of her graphic design business, which Isaac operates with her partner Scott Smith, has meant that she rarely does greyhound portraits anymore.

The company, Zacks, produces business cards, brochures, signage and corporate merchandise, such as hats and shirts.

Then of course there is the orange van and matching jackets that the Isaac Racing Kennels team turns out in when they come to race.

Cheryl designed the look and while it has prompted some competitors to call them the “orange people”, it adds a professional polish to their operation.

“Mick (Pollard, Lexia Isaac's partner) been



confused with the Bagwham on a couple of occasions and we get a lot of remarks about it being a school bus and things like that but its just people being jealous,” she jokes.

