

Titus Kana Photographer

by Cheryl Dunbar Kahlke



In three generations of aspiring photographers, Titus Kana is the first professional photographer. His photographic endeavors have ranged from a student in a high school class to an internationally published fashion and beauty photographer. His mechanics have grown from a makeshift kitchen darkroom to the latest in digital innovation. He is an expert adviser on AllExperts.com for digital imaging and the business of professional photography.

Titus Kana is the second generation for whom finding a life-mate was a serendipitous result of photography. The first occurred during World War II. Two salesmen who dabbled in amateur photography met at the USO (United Service Organizations) club in Patchogue. Titus' maternal grandfather, Herb Austin, had produced two local photographic albums to send to the servicemen overseas. Titus' father, Milan Kana, was stationed at Camp Upton (now Brookhaven National Laboratory). Herb had a daughter near Milan's age, and as Titus says, "Herb just happened to introduced Mil to his daughter Nancy, who quickly became his favorite subject and later, his wife."

Titus met his future wife, Jayne Cunniff, in 1978 when he was on one of his first shoots for *Cosmopolitan Magazine*. Jayne was *Cosmo's* fashion editor. Somehow they began to talk about Fire Island and Davis Park. Jayne had a house-share in Davis Park that year and she invited him to visit a few weeks after they met. Titus and Jayne added Davis Park to their busy lives – renting and eventually buying their home in 1989 when their daughter Betsy was four years old. Because Titus and Jayne live in the eastern-most community on Fire Island, Titus has photographed the eastern areas of Ocean Ridge, Davis Park, Fire Island Pines, and Cherry Grove, as well as Sunken Forest, Watch Hill and the Fire Island Lighthouse.

Titus was not a newcomer to Fire Island when he visited Jayne at Davis Park. When he was only five and living in Bellport, he remembers going to Fire Island with family friends who summered in Bellport. "They had a boat that took us from their bayfront house over to the old [Bellport] Coast Guard Station across the bay. We also went to Leja Beach with church groups. In the 60s, my parents joined Old Inlet Club, which was a private club for Bellport residents. It had a bathhouse, a concession stand and lifeguards... and I would go over [on the *Joseph E. Gerard* ferry] almost every day in the summer with friends. Around 1964 we got a 19 ft. sloop. We often sailed over to Fire Island and at times even camped out overnight."

Titus Kana's photography and Fire Island seemed to set his path. After his sophomore year in college, Titus transferred to RIT (Rochester Institute of Technology) to pursue a profession in photography. "Both my mother and father were behind my decision to transfer... but I



Former Watch Hill bridge, 2004, pulled up by the ice.

Photo by Titus Kana

had to wait a year to get in. During that time I worked for Suffolk County parks and Brookhaven Town parks and spent the summer of '75 working at Davis Park on the docks. I lived there on a houseboat with a couple of friends in the marina." In fact, Titus is the first generation to own a home on Fire Island.

Titus Kana began photography in the early 1970s



"Boys on Shipwreck," 1974.

Photo by Titus Kana

as a junior at Bellport High School when Joseph Layden, an art teacher at the school, organized the first photography class. "I had experience helping my father print pictures in his makeshift darkroom, but it was the class that encouraged me to start shooting. Mr. Layden loved what I was producing and became my mentor.

"My father gave me a lot of encouragement and offered me his camera for use in photography class. At first I developed my own black and white film and printed photos in our kitchen. We could only set up at night, because it was impossible to seal off the daylight... Around the second semester of my junior year,

we decided to build a darkroom in our basement. Joe Layden helped with the design, which was done in stages. Initially, it only had a counter and we would have to get water from upstairs to mix the chemicals. Then we added a sink without a drain and my older brother, Tim helped us to run hot and cold water pipes so we could fill up trays. It wasn't until I was at RIT that we had a plumber install a drainpipe that ran through a pump to get the water out of the basement.

"I'd have to say that my parents supported my commitment to photography one hundred percent... My father was really great with composition and I picked up his style early on. He taught photographic composition classes at the Bayard Cutting Arboretum in the 1980s after he retired from his job as a salesman. Titus assisted in projects his parents did for Patchogue's Congregational Church. "My mother was a great editor, both with the written word and with visual media. I helped her produce slide shows for the church and she wrote their 200th anniversary book." In the 1970s Titus and his father photographed the church and the photos recently were utilized in a poster for its 210th anniversary.

Now in their 80s, his parents are pleased that Titus' exhibit, "Bayside Impressions," at the Long Island Maritime Museum show in May included a tribute to his father and his maternal grandfather. Titus will be restoring some of the museum's photographs. "I have a side business of photo restoration called "Preserve Your Past" (www.preserveyourpast.com). Since I have a lot of experience in photo retouching, and I love the museum, I wanted to volunteer."

Sequentially, after he graduated from RIT in 1977, Titus worked at Gurney's Inn in Montauk the summer before he moved into New York City, thinking it would be his last job in a beach environment. Always a freelance photographer, Titus recalls, "My first big break was getting work for the advertising department of Saks Fifth Avenue. In 1982 I started shooting [their] full-page ads for the *New York Times* and in *Vogue*, *Bazaar* and *New York* magazines. A few years later I took my first studio and worked a lot with major clients such as J.C. Penney, Altman's, and Simplicity," in addition to *Town & Country*, *Cosmo*, *Woman's Day*, and *Woman's World*. This August 2005 the first issue of a new weekly magazine, *Quick and Simple*, will be out. Jayne is the fashion director and Titus is shooting photographic story illustrations.

In contrast, Titus describes fine art photography as "the combination of an artistic eye, technique and presentation that adds up to a piece of work that is worthy of display in a museum or gallery." Currently,

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