



THE COVER GIRL

By Lori Ward Bocher

Jennifer Samerdyke owes a lot to her brother, Chad Eberhardt. "I do owe him a lot, don't I?" she admits. "Almost as much as I owe Monroe Miller." Hers is a tale of how two golf course superintendents helped a young artist launch her career.

You know Jennifer as the cover artist for *The Grass Roots*, a job she's had since 1993. Her full-time job is as an art director at Stephan & Brady, a Madison-based advertising and public relations agency. She also does a little freelance graphic design work on the side. Her brother certainly can't take credit for her artistic talent. But he did influence her career and life choices along the way.

Jennifer was born in Milwaukee in 1972. She spent her childhood in Grafton. "I always drew when I was little," she recalls. "From Garfield to Peanuts characters, I was always doodling. When we got together at my aunt and uncle's house, they would always have a paper tablecloth. After the meal we would draw on it. It was such a huge area for drawing! That was always a highlight of going over to the relatives' house."

In high school, Jennifer was a cheerleader, soccer player and art student, among other things. "I did some drawing, but I never thought it would be my job," she points out. "I just thought it would be a hobby. I never thought I could actually make a living in the art profession. So when I went to college, I did not plan on being an art student." She graduated from Grafton High School in 1990.

Having visited her brother at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and having spent time on campus for Badger Girls State and other conferences, it didn't take her long to decide where to go to college. "I was familiar with the campus and just fell in love with it," Jennifer recalls. "Not only that, but how can you pass up such a great education?"

Her initial major? "My focus was



Jennifer Samerdyke and her husband, Paul, take time out from their wedding reception to pose with Bucky Badger.

always on business, so I started in accounting," she points out. "I began taking the prerequisites needed to get into the business school — economics, chemistry, English literature, etc. I really enjoyed those classes but always felt something was missing. I missed my art classes and being creative. I liked business, but I still needed to use my creative talents. What was I going to do?"

"My brother mentioned that Madison had an art program and he and my family encouraged me to look into it," she continues. "I did, and I discovered the career I was looking for — graphic design. So I decided to switch my major in my sophomore year." In 1994 she graduated with a BS in art with a graphic design concentration.

What's the difference between art and graphic design? "You could take this question in so many directions," Jennifer answers. "I'll just stick with one. There is fine art or visual art — like drawing, painting, and sculpture. And there's applied arts, like interior design, graphic design, or landscape design. Fine art is usually referred to as 'art for art's sake.' Applied art is usually referred to as the creation of

functional objects to be used. Graphic design involves creating a brochure, an ad, a newsletter, etc., to be used for a particular purpose."

So far her brother has helped her find the right college and the right major. What next? Her first job. When Jennifer was still in college, Chad was assistant superintendent to Monroe at Blackhawk Country Club. "Monroe was looking for someone to illustrate the covers of *The Grass Roots*, and my brother mentioned me. So I started doing the covers in 1993," she explains.

"Monroe, knowing what my major was, was able to help me get a part-time job at Kramer Printing in Madison — the company that prints *The Grass Roots*," she continues. "Much of my career success can be attributed to that job."

She started in the bindery — collating papers, copying, and other final preparations for delivery to clients. "Knowing what my major was, they would send me to the pre-press department when it got busy," Jennifer says. "I learned the printing process and a lot about the computer and its graphics programs."

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"I would love to go back to college classes," she continues, "and talk to the students and suggest, 'An important key to really knowing graphic design and getting your foot in the door is to begin your career with a printer because it teaches you the fundamentals.' A lot of employers look for that experience and consider it an excellent asset."

"When I graduated from the UW, Kramer Printing offered me a full-time job in the pre-press department," she adds. "I stayed there for about another nine months." In 1995, Kitson Marketing in Madison offered Jennifer an opportunity to work as a graphic designer.

Then she worked at Artville in Madison. "They commission work from illustrators and photographers from around the world and publish their work digitally — in the form of a CD," Jennifer explains. "People can then use these CDs for all of their graphic design needs."

"For example, if I were doing a brochure for a bank and needed an image of a man standing at a teller, I could search a CD and try to find that image and then use it in my brochure," she explains. "It's an alternative for those who choose not to hire a photographer or illustrator or need something better than just 'clipart.'"

In August of 1997, Jennifer started in her current job as an art director at Stephan & Brady. (In her profession, the natural progression is from production to graphic design to art director to creative director.)

As an art director, she creates and produces everything from ads to catalogs. "The difference between this job and my graphic design jobs is that now I oversee and coordinate with photographers, illustrators, separators, and printers, as well as doing the design," she points out.

"It's very challenging and a fast-paced environment," she says of her job. "Lots of deadlines!"

How does an agency come up with an ad or brochure? "Simply put, you first brainstorm with your creative team and begin to make preliminary sketches," Jennifer explains. "Once ideas have been tossed around and sketched out, you weed through them and go to the computer to tighten up the different ideas. Then you present your ideas to a client. They decide. If

visuals are involved, you either shoot photography or hire an illustrator or use an Artville CD. The computer is used to put it all together. After final approval from the client, the printer then takes your computer files and takes the rest from there."

Eventually, Jennifer would like to be a creative director at an agency or become a full-time freelancer. "Freelancing gives you flexibility," she says. "You decide what jobs you want to work on and how busy you want to be."

But of all her work, the covers for *The Grass Roots* are the only illustrating that she does, and she sees it as a pleasant diversion from her regular work. "It's nice to get away from my computer and create something from pencil and paper," Jennifer admits.

Her drawings are important to her portfolio. "I've included them in every interview I've been on," Jennifer points out. "It's definitely an asset to show someone that you have drawing skills and that your drawings have actually been produced. So I always include them."

Monroe gives her the subject matter for each cover and the photographs from which she draws. If there's more than one photo, she decides how they would work best together on the page. On average, it takes six hours to draw one cover. "Some take longer than others," she points out. "For instance, drawing turf equipment takes longer because of the intricate gears and parts. This isn't necessarily harder — it just takes longer."

"And the cover with the snowflakes (Jan./Feb. 1998) — you'd think it would be easy. But it's actually one of the hardest that I've done," she says, adding that she used actual photographs of snowflakes for that drawing. "The snowflakes had so many cool angles and shapes. It's really hard to duplicate that in a drawing. You'd be surprised at what's hard and what's easy."

Are people hard or easy to draw? "I think they're definitely harder than drawing a building or a piece of equipment," Jennifer answers. "You have some leeway with objects if they aren't drawn exactly right. But with people, if you're off just a bit with the eyes or nose, the person is no longer who you're trying to draw."

The eyes are the hardest. If they're not right, I'm not happy with the whole drawing."

Her medium has been pencil. "But this year we'll be using more color," Jennifer reports. "There are new and better things to come!"

One of her favorite covers was of Old Tom Morris. Another was of Ag Hall on the UW campus. "Both my husband and I went to the UW and it was fun drawing something that we both walked by for so many years," she points out.

Speaking of husbands, that's another reason Jennifer "owes one" to her brother. Yep. Chad and his wife knew her husband, Paul Samerdyke, before Jennifer did. And they helped to set her up on a date with him. Paul and Jennifer were married in August of 1997. Paul previously was a DNR wildlife biologist, but now he's working on a golf course construction project with Chad.

The newlyweds live in Columbus. "We enjoy camping, fishing, hiking," Jennifer says. "I've become an outdoors person since I met him, much to my family's surprise."

But it surprises no one that this energetic young artist and designer has come so far so fast in her profession. And to think she owes a lot of her success to a couple of golf course superintendents! ♣

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