



Behind The Lens

The story of photographer Kristina Kasting

By Carole Audet | Photography by Kristina Kasting

Multi-talented Kristina Kasting started her career as a graphic designer upon graduating from the Arts and Design program at Siauliai University in Lithuania. A creative at heart, her offerings have evolved over the years, with the most recent addition to her lineup of talents being photography—vegan food photography to be exact. Kristina enjoys veganizing some favourite Ukrainian and Lithuanian recipes—particularly those containing beets.

Kristina was born and raised in Lithuania, and she married her Canadian husband and started her own family there as well. “My mom is Lithuanian, and my dad was a Ukrainian—he passed away. My dad lived in Lithuania, and he spoke to my mom in Russian because the Ukrainian language wasn’t common. We would travel quite often with my dad to Ukraine. All my childhood memories are from summers there. I think my last visit as a child was when the Soviet Union crashed when I was around ten.”

Seeing the images that we've all seen shared on the news or social media, Kristina's heart is breaking because of the suffering inflicted on the people of this country, as well as seeing so much destruction. "It's so hard to focus because half my heart is there. It's taken a toll on all of us. We were always fearing Russia because they're powerful and they're like big bullies."

Most of us can only imagine what the people of Ukraine are going through, but Kristina is closer to this trauma because she still has family there—or she did until they had to flee for their lives. Her aunt and cousin with her two children are safe for the time being in Poland. They left by car along with three other people. "It was the most terrifying drive they took. Neighbours pitched in with gas. It was all women and one teenage boy. It took them four days, three nights to drive to the Poland border. All the roads are destroyed, and some exits or accesses were impossible to take."

During their harrowing drive, they were among the lucky who narrowly avoided their car being bombed or shelled. Looking in the rear-view mirror showed them just how close they came to being the target of a Russian attack, which in itself is traumatizing to witness.

Kristina speaks to her family every day. Despite their less than ideal living arrangement in Poland—the four family members share one room in a house with two other families—they don't want to travel anywhere too far away. Kristina has offered to help them immigrate to Canada, but they are hopeful that a resolution will be found and they will be able to return to their homes.

Adding to their desire to stay put for now is the Russian propagandist machine that is spreading lies about what is awaiting them if they were to leave permanently for countries like Canada or the US, such as passport confiscation and being forced into labour camps. Kristina is doing what she can to set the record straight, and in the meantime she's providing financial assistance when she's able.

Kristina and her husband Greg moved their family to Canada in 2017. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 was what started the wheels turning for their


relocation. "I think that instability triggered our thoughts. And then my husband's projects were nearing an end in Lithuania. For him it was also, 'What's next? Should I start something here or should we try something in Canada?'" The kids and Kristina agreed that Canada should be next.

Her children—Kai 13, Ella 10, and Nora 6—have dual citizenship now and they love living in Canada. "We moved to a beautiful Gulf Island, Thetis Island, where my husband's parents are, and we live on the ocean. It's like a dream come true."

Kristina had been running a successful printing business in Lithuania since 2010; she sold her shares once they had been in Canada for a couple of years. Eventually, her creativity turned to working with a DSLR camera.

Her venture into photography was done out of need. She was having problems finding relevant images to complement her graphic design work, so she decided to take them herself. "I started to get more into photography in 2015, but then it took me a year or so to actually say I'm a photographer





too. A couple of years later, I realized that my biggest passion in photography is working with food because I could combine my passion for visual arts and my passion for vegan food."

Kristina enlists the help of her mother-in-law in her food photography venture by asking her to grow specific vegetables. "She's a dedicated gardener, and I ask her to plant vegetables that I know will look beautiful in a photo. She is so helpful."

Her photography clients range from bloggers who share recipes online to the farmers who grow the vegetables and need images for their marketing, social media, or their displays. On her own social media, she makes it clear to potential clients—who are located worldwide—that she only photographs plant-based foods.

A raw vegan diet was Kristina's first foray into plant-based foods as a way to lose pregnancy weight. "I was never a big fan of meat or dairy, so I thought this should be easy for me. It wasn't easy because of the raw part of it. I still stuck to it for a year. After three months, I lost all my pregnancy weight."

But she was challenged with finding good quality, fresh produce in Lithuania. "No one knew about kale. I had to find a farmer who grew kale. I remember buying ten kilos of it. I filled the bathtub with cold water and washed it in the bathtub. My husband thought I was completely crazy. I bought a stand-up freezer to freeze whatever I could find."

Soon, the raw aspect of the vegan diet began to wear her down with the overwhelming effort she had to go through to sustain it. This led her to do some research into other options that would still leave her feeling great but be a simpler process to incorporate into daily life. She found tasty recipes and started to experiment with cooked plant-based meals—even introducing them to her family.

Her husband and children have yet to follow her down the vegan path completely, but she is educating her kids along the way. "We see animals that are roaming, like chickens from our neighbours; they come to sit on our laps and the kids get to pet them. If they leave an egg, they ask if it's okay. I won't eat it, but I explain the differences that they



can make. Hopefully, at some point, they will choose to be vegan." She claims they are close, given that she cooks only plant-based meals at home. In the meantime, she is setting an example for the family.

"I think the whole idea of the vegan lifestyle is not much of an effort at all—if you can combine the way you think, the things you do, and how you carry yourself daily. For me, I combine work with veganism. I find style that is vegan friendly and makeup as well. Why not do that if you can find everything you need?"

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"I look at it as what I gain. My photography is so colourful. If I want a pink shot, there are so many pink options. It's such a variety of colours for my art that I feel the doors opened when I decided I'd photograph vegan food. I don't see that I lost something or I cannot do things. I see it as what I found." •

If you'd like to learn more about Kristina and her photography, find her online at tinymomentscreative.ca and social media at:

  [tinymomentscreative](https://www.tinymomentscreative.com)