

Goremaster catches up with Kelcey Fry, professional makeup artist and instructor.

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By J.M. Jeffrey

GoreMaster recently had the wonderful opportunity to interview makeup artist Kelcey Fry. In her nearly 30 years in the profession, she has worked as an instructor for the Joe Blasco Professional Makeup Training Center, on films such as “Indiana Jones and The Kingdom of the Crystal Skull”, “The Pirates of the Caribbean”, and on television series such as “The Riches”. Kelcey gives us some very useful insights into the profession and reflects on an incredible career!

GM: What title do you like to refer to yourself as in the industry?

KF: I have actually had a marveled career where I have had the opportunity to department head, and design, etc. I’ve had all aspects of makeup artistry come at me in almost the 30 years that I’ve been a makeup artist. Eventually when you do department head you have then had the type of experience that then leads you to be more knowledgeable on how to man the ship so to speak. So I find it valuable in all aspects in doing my career I think that you can be more successful in completely manning the department when you know how all aspects of the department operate.

GM: Say you are a makeup artist who wants to stay busy in your “home town”...how do work with a production that comes in?

KF: Well, it’s ever changing now, in the past it used to be they maybe hook up in Hollywood and get their main department heads and keys together and as they go on location for budget concerns to avoid having to pay per diems, and hotel costs and living costs they’ll go and when they know they have some backgrounds that have not been established previously in the film, then they look for people within that area to help out.

Nowadays there are a lot of states that offer tax incentives so that people who come to work on a film or the production companies are motivated by extra tax dollars or tax incentives to try and employ as many people in that state as they can.

So I think that for people working in different states, they have to check their local film association or film commission and see what the state is offering. Usually if a film is coming into town the state film commission is aware of it in advance because they will have applied for those tax incentives and they will be already looking for locations. And usually those departments are way in advance of the production and the actual production team coming. You can get a step up if you know that a production is coming to your state and you can find out who the department head is and maybe forward your resume in advance.

GM: Is there a particular association that you recommend makeup artist to join?

KF: Anything locally helps you, for example, women in film, film associations or things that stimulate film production or film festivals where you can come into contact with people that are actually producers that are in production. I think that comes from the individual and how driven and motivated they are in seeking those things out.

GM: When did you make your decision to enter the field?

KF: I'm one of a very rare few that didn't grow up dreaming of being a makeup artist. I started as a hair dresser. That was by the necessity and means I needed to survive my independence when I got out of high school. And when I did that I went into cosmetic sales, by doing that I got familiar with how to deal with the average consumer. I think that the average consumer can be as challenging if not more challenging than most actors. Because you have all different skin types and people are looking for what's best for them and what suits them.

I was able to understand very quickly what worked best and what didn't work best with people.

I just elevated and did more photo shoots. I started to understand about lighting in photo shoots. I just really absorbed anything I possible could. I took a small little freelance day job for a balloon delivery company so I could work during the day and if I needed time off I could take the day off and if I got a [makeup] job I could go do it.

Then eventually by the mid 1980s I ventured to Los Angeles. I loaded up everything and thought "...if I'm going to make it as a makeup artist I wanted to go to Hollywood." That is where I learned that a professional makeup artist versus a beauty makeup artist is someone that can do beauty, aging, cuts and bruises, bald caps, beards, ear tips and noses and things of that sort. So I realized I had to further my education and that started the next segment of my career.

GM: How did you become professional makeup artist?

KF: It was recommended to me that I should go to the Joe Blasco Makeup Center. I had set up an interview and interestingly enough during the interview my portfolio of just my beauty makeup came to be impressionable enough to where they offered me in exchange for learning the entire program an opportunity to teach.

I remember being kind of stunned as I stepped out on to Sunset Blvd going "hmmm...I had gone into the interview to be accepted into the course and I come out and I have a job!" That's how it started. I spent about 6 weeks learning the curriculum working with one of Joe's associates while he developed the cosmetic company and then later on I worked with Joe to learn all the other areas that were needed. So, that was kind of luck of draw.

GM: Do you have a favorite artist or special effects person that comes to mind?

KF: I have had the opportunity to work with some really amazing people in different capacities, pinpointing [just] one might suggest that I feel that one is better than others. [That is certainly not the case].

I would say that there are several artists who understood that I came from a world where my reputation was known for beauty and gave me opportunities that were kind of into the new boundaries of special effects.

Specifically, [I can name] Mathew Mungle with WM Creations. He really was not only a mentor but somebody who really put his experienced wings around me and said "... Here [are] the basics...now do it." Even though he was guiding, he kind of let me walk that tight rope and was there as a safety net. He inspired my confidence.

Felicity Bowring is another person who does a lot of big films and she's someone who can incorporate everything from beauty all the way down to prosthetic design. She is the makeup designer and creator of "Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull." She has been a life long mentor though my career even in my early years.

Of course Ve Neill who embraces a lot of artists on all of her large projects. I remember one time just thinking "Gosh what a dream it would be to just be a part of the expanded crew that she puts together on her big projects." And so working with her and being a part of all of the "Pirates of the Caribbean" movies and currently helping her in her background area as coordinator for "The Soloist."

Working in this very competitive field it's hard to say to someone, "...should I use the Pros-Aid?" "How do you make those decisions? How do you make it impenetrable from water?" She's happy to give you a solution based on her experience. That's kind of a gift when artists don't hold on to their secrets and put them into a box and don't reveal them. Each one of these artists particularly to me, have influenced, embraced and mentored me to move outside of the boundaries that I started for myself, which were the basics of beauty and aging and things of that sort.

GM: Earlier when you were explaining a bit of your background you then talked about moving to Los Angeles and getting started in Hollywood. How did you then start obtaining work in the industry?

KF: I've noticed as I've taught through the years and worked with different people that there are so many different avenues to the main highway. For me personally my success is simply that for 25 years I have been able to put my occupation on my tax return as a makeup artist. It's extremely competitive; there are not enough jobs for the amount of people who are inspired to take on makeup artistry or hair styling/hair dressing in the industry. I really think that it starts from who you are first. You're capacity artistically is definitely important.

A lot of it is about personality, because it's about getting along with all different types of people under all different types of circumstances, it's stressful, there are long hours, there's traveling, there's competitiveness there's jealousy and politics. Politics is really, really big piece of the pie. Mainly, having the ability to communicate with and read people and deal with all the various working dynamics of people will help to bring you success in this business.

GM: Which brings me to another question which is: What is your advice for the beginner? Have I interpreted this portion right?

You're saying you can build your skills and that sort of thing...but even a person who starts out with moderate skill level; if they work well with people they can still be successful?

KF: Absolutely. But if your skill level is such where you're putting at risk the eyes and the skin and you do not understand the differences between solvents and adhesives and removers and things of that sort and you're putting the person at risk then you definitely have skill levels that will not lead you to success.

Skill level is essential, but the thing about skill level is that with repetition and with practice and with consistency of that, you can smooth out the rough edges. If you do it long enough and you practice and practice you will pick up the ideas, it's not about coming out of the box "perfect" it's about understanding the basics.

A professional makeup artist is someone who can take most any script and understand how to interpret exactly what needs to go on. It's about incorporating all of the aspects of makeup artistry. Professional to me is defined by somebody who seamlessly makes it work without making it noticeable that they had a hard time making it work.

It's kind of like the story of makeup artist Harry Thomas. He was working in the 1930s and 1940s and used to define professionalism by telling a story to the kids when we taught together back in the 1980s. The old "horse's tail" story which was that he was out doing a western and he was in the middle of the desert, and they wanted a beard on this guy. He didn't have any hair and the way that he made it work was that he just went and took a swish off of the end of the horse's tail and cut the hair and nobody knew any different...and it came out and he was able to make it all work. It's about making it work when you're in the middle of not having what it is that you need.

GM: Would you say that's the better advice or training that you received as well? That you need to just make it happen and try not to affect the process? By this I mean if you don't have with you exactly the tools that you normally use.

KF: Right, I think that there are times and there are issues where it's like "well wait a minute...we didn't know that you needed that contact lens." I mean there are certainly some times when we need to go back and get the contact lens. I you can't just throw something in the eye and go "see his eye's all swollen or something..." but it is about thinking outside of the box. The box is "I have everything...I brought everything"... and then you pack it all up and you forget an essential thing just out of the nature of being busy and you get there and that's the one thing that you need. How do you solve that problem seamlessly? That is the person that works on defining professionalism. It is trying to solve any problem seamlessly...you can't always do it...you can't always pull a rabbit out of your hat...but there are many times that you can. You might have to borrow something from another department...ask them to help you out. And then you extend that same rapport to another department. It's all very collaborative.

GM: What was you're toughest job?

KF: I think that for me it's hard in this exact minute to go "oh my toughest job"...I think that each job has areas that are challenging. There are some jobs where the lighting was challenging...the nature of the lighting in trying to get that to work well with a character. Understanding lenses and lighting can be very challenging. Stepping up to the plate to make sure that the interpretation of the makeup is understood properly through the lighting. People don't realize that lighting is "the sister" it is what communicates the makeup otherwise it is just a two dimensional situation and throughout time if you read all the history books about makeup artistry...makeup has evolved through the nature of film stock and mediums and lighting and now we're into High Def. Makeup and skin and special effects are always affected by this.

Certainly the natural eye is the key but there are times when you are going to have to adapt. I find that those times are challenging because currently these days it's really quite challenging to get makeup tests.

Each project has [its challenges]. Sometimes it's the hours, sometimes it's driving out to distant locations and driving 70 miles in one direction in Los Angeles out to Palmdale and working under wind machines and water and stuff flying all over you and working 17 hour days for 5 days a week and putting in 80 or 90 hours a week is challenging.

That is why passion has driven me by a love/hate relationship because in the moments that you are distraught with your job when you're just going "Ugh! I can't do this...this going is too far!" When you finish something the love of that helps you bridge that gap when you get into those challenging moments. You go "Wow! I got a chance to work on that."

So for me, my biggest challenge is to maintain the longevity until my retirement and to have those experiences and to be respected by my peers. Other than that to me every job is a challenge. There are moments when the cream rises to the top and you feel glamour.

[Working with] Diane Keaton was a really creamy moment and it's really tasty and then there are other times where you're doing your job and you're supporting other teams that are advancing their careers.

You know sometimes it's really important to be strong and supportive and then your department heads they shine and people respect that. Ve Neill respects all of the 10s and 10s of people that she had to bring her to that place where she is nominated and she respects all those people that worked hard and diligence and took her instruction and her designs and [they] were professional enough to follow through and get the job done. That's important [trait to have] in your career.

GM: Well then with that brings me to my next question which was going to be what is your favorite job?

I had a lot of fun working on the "Pirates of the Caribbean" and "Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull". I had challenges that were offered to me that said "hey you're going to be a part of this and you're going to be able to step out of your box and do this." And think those opportunities made it really creamy for me because it allowed me to have self challenge and I think any time a person can have self challenge there is growth from that. Any time you grow when you can take that with you and it makes you a better artist and it brings you closer to your peers and you can share that as a mentor to other people that you are teaching in a Journeyman class or another class I think those are probably my moments.

Because they are big you know they are epic movies and they require a lot. You really are self testing yourself your stamina, endurance what you do and what you don't know you're weak points and your strong points and when you can have self observation like that...that is a great thing to have.

GM: When you're working on a project how do you pick the makeup that you're going to use? Do you sometimes make your own or are there certain brands that you typically use?

Currently now, I have literally, one of everything. Because in today's world actors kind of demand it. Set dressing is very key in a world where cleanliness is really important. Set dressing means what you have and how your station looks.

For instance, we always talk when we are working together [about] the ultimate day checking bag which is when you carry around these suitcases that have these zipper pouches that have a little bit of everything in them. Back in the day guys would just pull out their wooden case pull out a couple of bottles it was spirit gum maybe a little collodian and you called it a day.

Nowadays there is just so much and people would be like “I would prefer you to use this as opposed to that.” Everyone has a different idea of how they might do something. When you have a more array of product it allows you to be more versatile not only when an actor sits in front of you but also when you go to work for other people.

A lot of times if I go to work for someone I’ll say “Well what should I bring?” “Bring your beauty kit.” Well when I bring my beauty kit I’m probably bringing 4 to 5 different foundations in any where from light to dark colors.

I’m an artist so it’s like I got to have whatever allows me to do my job well.

GM: Are there any breakthroughs or ideas in the industry that excite you right now that you’ve noticed?

Christian Tinsley developed a tattoo transfer that [I believe] started on the movie Pearl Harbor a movie that Julie Hewett had also worked on. She is wonderful artist and has a beauty line.

Mr. Tinsley created this transfer that’s done in a process where actually the Pros-Aid has the coloring on it that has the effect of a cut or the bruise [that is transferred to the skin using] this thin film or acetate it’s a little heavier than Saran wrap it’s a little sturdier. You can literally buy them online you can go to [his website](#) and you can see it more thoroughly and you literally transfer by the use of water and these cuts can come on and all you have to do is add texture. He’s developed tattoos this way which is commonly used in the industry.

[Skin Illustrator](#) palettes [developed by Kenny Myers] are pretty remarkable I have to say that I’m in love with those [and] different people make other types of palettes. Fred C. Blau makes one that’s called [Reel Creations](#) he makes blood and all kinds of things and he makes the palettes.

Mathew Mungle [WM Creations](#) he makes the palettes he also makes these types of Pros-Aid transfers that have cuts and scars. When you put them on all you have to do is splash the edge with a little bit of alcohol or a little bit of Witch Hazel and it just melts right in and that’s in and then the Pros-Aid sticks and so it’s naturally adhered to the skin.

[Premiere Products](#) make these palettes that are pigments that the vehicle has been taken out of it. So when you get the pallet they have all different colors aging colors all these different kinds of colors and when you get the pallet they are really hard inside the pallet and then you activate them with alcohol and when they go on the skin they stay on the skin and they don’t move so if like you do an aging spot or a bruise or a cut or something or you add some discoloration you know the person can jump through the water or go into the ocean and do whatever and they are constantly used. It can be used as simply if a woman has a tattoo on her back and she’s got to wear a white wedding dress and she

doesn't want the makeup to come off on the edge you can use the Skin Illustrator palette...powder right over it and it won't come off and it won't rub off on the dress.

I would say that those are the two things that I really like the most and you can look those up I don't want to promote one palette over the other.

Whether I have my beauty kit or my makeup special effects kit I probably own about 15 of the palettes and they come in many varieties of colors. They also come in a liquid form that can go through an airbrush as well. But the palettes make it really easy and you can do a lot of detail work with them.

GM: How do you envision the future of makeup special effects or do you notice anything when we talk about CGI and the computer stuff.

CGI is here to stay and things are going to advance [the industry] it's only going to get more refined. It's going to really require makeup artists to really be on their game and to be really, really be finite with detail because with high def and all these other mediums that will be extremely critical.

I think that it's going to be an integral part of the design of makeup and to accomplish some of the real critical looks that directors and scripts are asking for. Like the "Octopus man" in Pirates. It used to be like "Oh, CGI it's too expensive." It is an expensive process but they are coming up with such refinement in these processes to the computer that they are just adding them in.

Before it [CGI] used to be very selective "...like maybe this thing over here or maybe that thing over there" but now it becomes an integral part because some of these movies are all special effects. "Transformers" and "Alien" movies and "Star Trek" and you know all these movies are incorporating that kind of technology I think it's just on its way. There are sometimes you're doing makeup where you are watching the little orange and blue dots on people's faces where they are going to digitally enhance that particular character. It is definitely a part of the future.

GM: What current project are you working on or is there a project that you are excited about?

Well currently I've been working with my peers that are helping Ve Neil in here project "The Soloist" which I think is a very heartfelt project. It's about a man named Nathaniel Ayers, he's a gentleman that is a Julliard musician and fell into some circumstances in regards to his health that created a very dynamic story. That's heartfelt because now we're getting kind of an emotional experience by being a part of the project. But we've had some fun...we done some period work. That's always nice.

Currently a show that I have that's running right now is the "Riches" which is on FX and we just completed 7 [episodes]. [I am] getting ready to go teach a class which I love to do.

GM: What are some of your favorite movies?

KF: Yes, there'd be a few that come to mind. I have to say "La Vie en Rose" was very touching because that's really fresh in my mind. "The Last Emperor" is one of my favorite makeup movies ever. Starship Troopers that's my favorite! If I need a movie to make me laugh I love "Pricilla Queen of the Desert." There's a movie that is going to be coming out that I can't wait for...it's based on a documentary called "Grey Gardens". The movie will be [based on the life stories of the eccentric aunt and first cousin of Jackie Kennedy]. The age makeup will be designed by Bill Corso who is a fantastic artist. He won the Academy Award for "Lemony Snicket's: A Series of Unfortunate Events" and he's amazing!

For more information about Kelsey's work visit her website at <http://www.lipsink.com>