

My Job
Sandra Cormack —
Makeup Artist

Dream
career
becomes
reality



If you happen to be looking for a makeup artist, the police cordon outside the G20 conference is unlikely to be your first port of call (writes Sean Hamilton).

Usually the natural habitat of the dreadlocked protester and the riot cop, the perimeter of the frequently contentious meeting isn't exactly the most fashionable of places.

"Oooh, officer! Your baton and shield combo is, like, soooooo last season," is a conversation you definitely won't hear should you pitch up one year for a peek.

Last November, however, when the conference rolled into St Andrews, Dundee-based makeup artist Sandra Cormack found herself stuck on the front line, having been stranded by a surprisingly inefficient German TV station.

"I was stood outside the hotel in St Andrews for a good half-hour in the howling wind and rain," she explains, smiling at the memory.

"This German TV company had sent their chief reporter over to cover the conference and had booked me to do her hair and makeup, which was great.

"They forgot to organise a pass for me though, so I was being held outside at the police checkpoint.

"I'd already met up with her and done the job, luckily, but I hadn't been paid yet so I stuck about.

"Even though it was pretty mad it was brilliant to be doing it. It's such a change from where I've come from work-wise."

Sandra's change in career was finalised last June when she established SC Makeup Artistry and set about getting her name out on the streets.

Since then, in addition to the aforementioned TV work, she's participated in photo shoots for national fashion magazines and made-up models at London Fashion Week.

The former community worker took the decision to strike out alone after

realising life wasn't all it could be in her previous role.

It's a feeling many people can identify with, and having made the leap herself, Sandra is firmly of the opinion that following your dreams can lead to huge rewards.

"The last job I had I really didn't enjoy," she says.

"I was stuck in an office and felt like I was going nowhere. I was on a year to year contract and I was thinking, 'what's the point?'"

"I'm 45-years-old now so I decided to change things and the next job had to be what I really wanted to do.

"I love what I'm doing now. It's not just a job for me — it's something I'm really passionate about."

Pinning down ambition can be tough for many people. That almost indefinable pull towards something wonderful often takes its time to drag you off balance.

Years can elapse while dreams become ideas. Having discovered her muse, Sandra's more aware than most of the difficulties involved in taking control of one's working life, but also, given her success, more hopeful.

"It took me a long time to decide what I was really motivated by," she says.

"That's especially important for younger people to remember, I think. Yes, it took me a long time, but the fact that I've now found something I really love just goes to show it's never too late to change your life.

"I'm a great believer in fate and there weren't any barriers in my way. If things aren't right, I think you tend to see those barriers and it becomes a struggle.

"Even though I've got less money coming in just now than I would have if I'd stayed in community work and I don't have a regular salary, it's never felt like a struggle."



Getting into the cut-throat world of fashion makeup isn't just as simple as deciding it's the career for you, however.

There are courses to take and, of course, a portfolio to build before any casting director will even consider hiring you.

Thankfully for Sandra, the contacts she's made locally, as well as through more high-profile work, have given her a kick start.

"I've got a lot of great photos just now and I'm constantly developing that because that's what bookers want to see," she explains.

"What I've learnt is unless you're selling makeup on a makeup counter no one is interested in your certificate at all — it's about your portfolio and your body of work.

"I've had a lot of support in getting that going from places like the Dundee and Angus Chamber of Commerce, the Business Gateway and Women Ahead.

"Joining all these organisations is good as a networking thing. I've been able to get in touch with other people who are starting their own businesses, like photographers, beauty therapists and stuff.

"Those links are really helpful throughout the life of a business, but at the start it's even more so."

Contrary to what you might think, the life of a makeup artist isn't played out entirely on location. A large part of Sandra's week is taken up with personal bookings, whether it's for a wedding, a special occasion, or just for tuition.

Despite the relative lack of glamour in this type of work, she insists it's just as important as the fashion shoots.

"I've been doing pretty well with those kinds of bookings actually," she says.

"Weddings are important for brides

and families, so it's important to get it right. It's something I take a lot of care and pride in.

"I also do one-to-one sessions with people who are maybe looking for a bit of help of advice with a certain technique.

"I recently did a session at Dundee Chamber of Commerce for a group and it was really successful, so that's another area I'm getting into."

It hasn't all been plain sailing however. Certain aspects of running her own business have proved challenging.

Thankfully though, just as with gathering contacts, Sandra found help relatively easily among the local business support community.

"Book keeping was definitely a challenge," she says.

"That was scary at first. It's the part I like the least, I suppose like a lot of people, because you just want to get stuck into the creative stuff.

"Again, I had help which I found through the Business Gateway, from someone who did the basics like drawing up a spreadsheet, and that made a big difference.

"I also made-up a bride not long ago and she was a trainee accountant. I mentioned I could do with a hand and she suggested we do a deal whereby I give her makeovers and she did my books!

"These opportunities are always out there. That's what I mean about the barriers — it's all worked out. Things have just slotted into place."

Sandra is an example of what can be achieved by anyone with a dream and just enough courage to follow it.

She's her own boss, thriving with her new-found freedom and I can tell, just by talking to her, that she's not making it up.

Visit Sandra's website at www.scmakeupartistry.co.uk

