

EDGE

interview

TV's Prospectors

Amanda Adkins Anderson • Krystle Dorris Velasco

All photography courtesy of The Weather Channel

One of the surprise hits in the world of Reality TV is ***Prospectors***, which recently completed its third season on The Weather Channel. The program explores the lives of miners working Colorado's imposing Mt. Antero, one of North America's most productive in terms of gems and minerals—but also one of its most treacherous. Millions of viewers tune in each week to follow the high-pressure, low-oxygen adventures of veteran diggers in their quest for one-of-a-kind specimens. EDGE Editor **Mark Stewart** caught up with two of the show's most popular characters—**Krystle Dorris Velasco** and **Amanda Adkins Anderson**—during the Tucson Gem Show. Krystle's family employs heavy machinery in its mining efforts, while Amanda (who recently married digging partner Travis Anderson) chips away at the mountain by hand. On the way to putting a glamorous face on the gem and mineral industry, these

“rock hounds” achieved something far more important—they have become two of the strongest and most admired female characters on reality television.

EDGE: What you do on *Prospectors* is hard and risky work. What is it that enables you to push through barriers and make a living in this business?

AAA: Experience and discipline. This is really a special process. We've gotten to where we can read the dirt like a book. It is hard work, but we've got it down pat.

KDV: I think you have to go above and beyond what's expected. I have an incredible work ethic. It was something instilled in me when I was very young. If there is something you want in life, you have to put everything you've got into it. If you make that effort it will be rewarding and it will pay off.



Amanda Adkins Anderson

AAA: You definitely have to know how to do this before you jump in and try it.

EDGE: Can newcomers really understand what's required to be successful?

KDV: People who want to make a living prospecting are surprised how much work it takes. In this industry you really have to push yourself. And it's so much more complicated than anyone can understand, just taken at face value. You have to find product and develop inventory that is good enough to be *bought*. For every good pocket that you find, I'd say we hit 10 to 20 that aren't worth the effort we put into them. A lot of people just don't have the perseverance or fortitude to find that one great pocket and get it out of the ground.

AAA: And they really don't get a sense on TV of the danger—how steep those angles are, and how many rocks are falling off the cliff face. You have to listen, you have to distribute your weight properly, you have to really stay in tune with the ground and know how it feels right before

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it gives way. I cannot describe how critical it is to know all of these little things just to live through a day. I question whether I could even train somebody to do what I do.

EDGE: On the show, we see you primarily during the spring and summer digging season. What's your typical year look like?

KDV: From May to late September, my family is on the mountain. In September, we start our gem show season, and I do about 10 shows a year. That's a lot of prepping and packing of inventory for sale. It takes a lot of time just to prepare a label and a box, and to present your product in a way that makes someone want to purchase it. In addition to that, I'm doing the company's advertising and marketing, handling Internet sales, shipping products, working with clients who are looking for certain minerals, and helping customers fall in love with our specimens. I do this continuously, throughout the year.

AAA: We dig 12 months out of the year. If we're not at a gem and mineral show, we're out digging. Typically five days a week, depending on the season, in a number of different locales.

EDGE: What's more exciting when you dig, the chance you'll discover a Holy Grail-type specimen or just the suspense of seeing what you'll find next?

KDV: It's kind of both. The element of surprise is what drives you. But you're always looking for the next great specimen, too. Whatever comes out you're grateful for what God gives you. We do have dreams of finding a particular mineral or specimen that's absolutely incredible, and we'll always be searching for it. After all, that's how you make a name for yourself as a prospector.

AAA: It's definitely both.

EDGE: Do you ever find the "ultimate" specimen?

KDV: We've come very close to finding what we would consider the "standard" in smoky and amazonite. We've been very fortunate in the last five years. But prior to that, there were 10 years where we weren't. So we're happy where we're at, but we'll always keep digging...because you never know.

EDGE: How does the family dynamic impact what you do?

KDV: Any time you work with someone—especially family members—there's emotion involved. We are human. We've had our tiffs. But my brothers and I were taught to have



Krystle Dorris Velasco

respect for my parents and to listen to them. And you can see they have a lot of wisdom. At the end of the day, we love and respect each other too much to let something break us apart. We're a close-knit unit. Everyone in our family contributes something, and we all have respect for what each person is contributing. Dad's been in the business since the year I was born, 1986. We've all grown up with prospecting and with selling at different shows. The company we have now has been at it since 2005. I've been working for the company for all 10 years and full-time for five. We all understand this business.

AAA: I come from a family of rock hounds. They got me started at the age of 12. This is my 23rd year digging and selling gemstones. I was born in West Virginia and we moved to Colorado when I was 11. When I got out of college, I was making more doing this than any job I would have gotten, so I stuck with it. I started with a 3-foot banner and a tiny table to now where we have a 64-foot banner across a booth at the major venues, including Tucson, Denver and the one in Edison, New Jersey.

EDGE: Amanda, how has your situation changed since you married your digging partner?

AAA: I feel a lot safer. I've got my two huskies, which is great, but now a lot fewer claim jumpers approach me because they know he's there. I don't feel like a sitting duck anymore.

EDGE: Is the threat of violence real?



AAA: Absolutely. I don't think they could show what goes on with some of the miners on TV. We do get confronted. There is no law enforcement on the mountain. It can be very scary. You try to keep the peace and help everyone you come across. Stay friendly and stay focused. If you see a hiker you ask if they need water. You try to make friends. But once in a while you get the bonehead who wants to pick a fight...and that's what they'll get.

EDGE: Is claim jumping that big of a problem?

AAA: It is. Claim jumpers will watch you and wait until you leave, and then when you look up at the claim at night you can see their headlamps as they work your pocket.

EDGE: Many of the *Prospectors* characters appear to be one loose rock away from a trip to the graveyard. How do you balance the risk vs. the reward?

KDV: Safety is a concern for everyone in the industry, especially after someone you know has been killed in a cave-in or has had a close call. A lot of the people you see on the show *are* one boulder away from death. Mt. Antero is a very tricky area. You never know which way those rocks are going to go.

AAA: I actually don't think they show *how* dangerous it is. We see a lot of injuries on the mountain. We had to help several claim jumpers off the mountain in 2014. People go up there not knowing what they're doing and they get hurt, and we have to spend time getting them off the mountain instead of what we should be doing. In that regard the show has been a mixed blessing.

EDGE: What's the biggest change you've seen in the business since *Prospectors* debuted?

AAA: I have definitely seen more people collecting



since the show started airing. There had been a lot of rock hounds collecting and digging among the older generations, but then it kind of died out. For a couple of decades, collecting wasn't considered a cool thing. Now, interest is skyrocketing and people are paying attention to the gem world. Suddenly the mom and pop rock shops can't keep enough stuff in stock.

KDV: What I've noticed since *Prospectors* came out is an increase in women who are interested in prospecting, but even more of an increase in women who are interested in starting a collection. I love that. That's such an exciting thing to see, because aesthetically these specimens are beautiful. We put dinner plates in our curio cabinet. Why not put the most beautiful minerals made by nature in there?

AAA: Also a lot of families at the gem and rock shows are bringing their daughters to the booth to take pictures with us. I really like that. We encourage girls to join their local gem and mineral society. They can instruct you on how and where to dig safely. It's a great outdoor family activity. Just about every state has gemstones of one kind or another. When I see people bring their kids to the booth and they talk about how excited they are to watch us on *Prospectors*—and how much they like collecting—that's just good to hear. It's cute, it's adorable. It's exciting.

KDV: I've seen women buy a \$40 specimen and it's an exhilarating experience for them because they've just started their collection. They will always remember that moment. That is one of the things makes me love what I do. **EDGE**