

## McCord's Photos Capture the Eye

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Staff Writer

If Lisa McCord hadn't gone into photography, she would have been a dancer. "I studied dance from the time I was five to 30," the longtime Palisadian said, adding that it was the pre-MTV era and there weren't many ways to make a living as a dancer.

The lifelong artist and photographer hails from the small town of Osceola, Arkansas, the offspring of a free-spirited mother who frequently moved McCord and her two siblings whenever she had a creative urge. The family moved 13 times during her childhood, including stints in Little Rock, Memphis, Atlanta and Cape Cod.

Her father, Lindsey J. Fairley, who comes from a family of doctors and lawyers, took a more traditional path, becoming a district attorney and judge.

But it was the creativity of her mother, Nancy Ohlendorf Fairley, and maternal grandmother Frances Jones Ohlendorf—both painters—that most influenced McCord. Despite her rigorous academic high school education at boarding school at Cranbrook Kingswood School in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, her parents knew she was an artist.

McCord was also inspired by her stepfather, James Zimmerman, who was a painter and photographer.

Though she was planning on becoming a lawyer when she started New York University, McCord began taking photography classes, and learned her way around a darkroom. Photography quickly trumped her interest in law, and she eventually received her B.F.A. from the San Francisco Art Institute.



Photographer Lisa McCord.

Photo: Bart Bartholomew

Today, McCord calls herself a documentary photographer, which she describes as "walking the streets, talking to people and taking pictures," especially in Arkansas.

Locally, she sets up shoots, but she wants to start bringing her documentary photography eye to the Palisades.

"Although I went to art schools," McCord says, "I have always documented my family and my life, telling my stories and my memories. I relate to documentary photography, and was influenced by that means of photography from my experience of living in Paris," where she studied in the late 1970s.

"Growing up on a farm," she says, "I could not help but be influenced by the Farm Security Administration photographers who photographed the farmwork-

ers in the mid-1930s.

"When I first did this work my teachers didn't get it. They asked, 'Why would you shoot poverty?' Because there's love and family and beauty," she told them.

Despite her many moves and extensive traveling, McCord retains a Southern lilt in her voice, as well as the charm of a Southern belle. Her Arkansas roots run deep, and still inform her outlook and photography. "I'm very much a Southern lady. I'm a good hostess. I have good manners," she says. "I'm conservative in some ways, but my ideology is totally liberal." She has lived in Los Angeles since getting her M.F.A. from CalArts in 1985.

While I was interviewing McCord, *Palisades News* photographer Bart Bartholomew arrived to take pictures, and what

transpired was fascinating: two professional photographers who love their craft talking shop, discussing influences, experiences and techniques.

In fact, Bartholomew deconstructed several of McCord's photos from her "Rotan Switch" series, and spoke in detail as to why they were such masterful shots. By looking at several pictures, he knew that McCord gets "a lot of trust" from her subjects, evidenced in some revealing images. To this reporter, a photography novice, it was a wonderful lesson.

"Her job is to capture your eye and make it stay inside the frame," Bartholomew said, explaining that McCord excels at that.

Currently, McCord is working on her sixth book, *Nancy Sherwood: My Mother's Passing*, which is also the name of her cur-



McCord's hometown is Osceola, Arkansas.

Photo: Lisa McCord



McCord's current exhibit, "Nancy Sherwood: My Mother's Passing," features this image of McCord's niece and nephew, Chloe and Samuel Everett.

Photo: Lisa McCord



A tenant farm family that lived on McCord's grandfather's farm, from the "Rotan Switch" series.

Photo: Lisa McCord

rent show at Los Angeles Art Association's Gallery 825 (through February 19). The recent opening boasted a large, enthusiastic crowd. "People could not get in," she said.

Sherwood passed away on February 5, 2015 in Burbank, when McCord and other family members were on their way to see her.

McCord's grandparents' house in Arkansas is featured in some of the photos, and it's a fascinating look through time, with old-fashioned wallpaper and furnishings.

"The house was built by my grandfather and grandmother when my mother was three. We always went back. It was the only

permanent place in our lives," says McCord, who currently owns the home along with other relatives.

Her grandfather was a tenant farmer and a self-made man, well liked and respected by whites and African Americans alike. When agriculture became automated, he worked with Governor Bill Clinton in the late 1980s-early 1990s to bring industry to the community so his workers and others would still have jobs.

McCord lives near Fire Station 69 with her husband, Don, a builder and Palisades High School graduate. They have been married



Self-portrait, Malibu.

Photo: Lisa McCord

since 1989. Son Dedrick, 23, also a Palisades grad, is a senior at Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, and recently returned from a semester in Southeast Asia. Both father and son attended preschool at the Palisades Methodist Church.

When Bartholomew and I entered McCord's house for a photo shoot, she gave us a tour of all the artwork. "My house looks like a gallery," she said, showing us her photographs as well as a wall of photos taken by friends with whom she has traded pic-

tures. Large canvases featuring McCord, painted decades ago by her mother, also hang in the home.

McCord continues to expand her photography knowledge with classes, including digital printing, and is inspired by the young artists she meets. "I love working in the sunshine at my computer," she says, adding that she never loved working in a darkroom.

"I love art. I love photography."  
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