

Turning adversity into platinum prints

SOMEWHERE IN her iPhone, Rachael Short has a photograph of herself as a 3-year-old holding a camera. Maybe that's really where it all started, she muses.

When she was 12, her father, Scott Short, gave her a Canon AT-1 35mm camera, which she mostly used to shoot pictures of teammates on her Carmel Valley swim team. Four years later, at 16, she was already shooting

Short's own photos, a 20-year retrospective of her work.

"I just finished doing a lecture about it at the Center for Photographic Art, and it made me feel old," said Short. "Have I really been doing it for that long?"

Artistic leanings might be part of her DNA. Her younger brother, Alex, was a relentless sketcher growing up and just graduated from

Cal Poly with a degree in architecture. Her mother, Katherine Jenkins, is a painter of still life and landscapes. Her great-great-grandmother on her father's side, Jessie Francis Short, painted in Carmel

in the early 1900s in a studio at Dolores and Seventh, where El Paseo Court is now. Her art was part of a group show at the M.H. de Young Museum in San Francisco.

"I'm fifth-generation Carmel, and right now I'm living in a house — my great-aunt's property (near downtown) — that's been in our family for 100 years," she said. "I have my great-great-grandmother's painting of the Carmel Mission, with Point Lobos in the background, and some of her other watercolors in my house today."

Very special prints

Paralysis from the accident left Short with very minimal movement in her upper body, which essentially put her beloved film cameras on the shelf, but it didn't derail her career.

"I'm shooting now with my iPhone," she explained. Her images are turned into negatives on a digital printer, which Kim Weston uses to make platinum prints.

"It's a challenge to get the iPhone to work for me in a way my film cameras did, but, on the other hand, shooting with an iPhone has also simplified everything. It's probably allowed me to focus my vision a little bit more," said Short, who also says her mobility issues

Carmel's artists

By DENNIS TAYLOR

some of the black-and-white images she displays today at Gallery Exposed, her own space on San Carlos Street between Ocean and Seventh.

"I got special permission to take the photography class at Carmel High as a sophomore, which allowed me to work in their darkroom for three years," said Short (Class of 2000), who moved to Santa Barbara after graduation to study at Brooks Institute of Photography.

"I definitely don't consider myself to be self-taught. I've had a lot of great teachers along the way at Carmel High, and Brooks, and now back here at home," she said. "Kim Weston has been a huge influence on me, and he's actually making my prints for me now, which is pretty amazing. I feel very spoiled!"

Short hasn't been able to do her own work in a darkroom since she was injured in an automobile accident on Halloween night in 2010, a crash that left her paralyzed, a quadriplegic, at age 28.

"I miss it," she said of the hours she spent working on her own prints. "But there are a lot of things I miss. I've just got to move forward."

The walls of her Carmel Square gallery — which is open from 1 to 3 p.m. Saturdays, and by appointment — are adorned entirely with

See **SHORT** next page



PHOTO/DANIELLA MURO

Photographer Rachael Short may not be able to walk, but she has perfected the art of taking photos with an iPhone and turning them into fine art prints.

SHORT

From previous page

sometimes don't allow her to get as close to her subjects as she'd like to be.

Short suspects that her eye for photography evolved during her childhood. She grew up on Tassajara Road in Carmel Valley, an hour inland, and remembers spending hours riding to and from Carmel-by-the-Sea.

"Of course, there weren't any iPhones or iPads in those days, so I looked at the scenery — the beautiful scenery — and the clouds in the sky," she said. "I really think that influenced me, made me see things a little bit differently.

"What catches my eye first is the light, which has to be right," Short said. "And I also notice shapes, textures, contrast, shadows, composition..."

She credits Carmel High (where she

served as class president) not only for sparking a lifelong interest in photography, but also in anatomy and physiology. At one point, she considered a career in occupational therapy or physical therapy.

"That's a bit ironic today, because physical therapy and photography are the two things I do every day," she said. "I exercise about four hours every day, standing, stretching, doing arm exercises ... if I sit in this wheelchair for two hours, I'll go home and feel pretty stiff."

Short said her art played a big role in her recovery after the accident, and continues to be therapy for her today.

"It's wonderful that I was able to continue with it," she said. "It's something that didn't get taken away from me, and it's something else to think about."

Images of her work and more information can be found online at rachaelshort.com.

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