

Obituaries

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JACQUELINE MCCLINTOCK ACTING TEACHER, 55

Her lessons helped to produce stars

Instead of waiting around for the phone to ring as an actor, she trained others for the big roles

NOREEN SHANAHAN

Someone once said a good teacher affects eternity; she can never tell where her influence stops. And when the teacher is an acting coach, like Jacqueline McClintock, her influence extends into each role played by each actor taught, reaching beyond the stage or screen and into the lives of millions of viewers.

As an acting teacher and theatre director for 30 years, McClintock worked with well over a thousand actors, screenwriters, directors, and cinematographers mostly in her Toronto and Montreal studios. With her trademark slash of red lipstick, tight ponytail and forceful presence, she stepped up to her students and demanded excellence.

McClintock began her career as an actor, but found it unhealthy for actors to spend their days sitting around waiting for the phone to ring. So she decided to teach, beginning with sharing tips with a handful of actor friends.

Word grew and she ultimately taught beginner, intermediate and advanced classes in Toronto, Montreal, Amsterdam, Munich and Palma, Spain.

In 2010, three of her protégés stepped onto the TIFF red carpet. Rachele Lefevre, Scott Speedman and Anna Hopkins starred in *Barney's Version*, Richard J. Lewis's film based on Mordecai Richler's novel. Each of these actors credited McClintock for their success — Lefevre went so far as to say she wouldn't have a career at all if not for McClintock.

Lefevre played Barney Panofsky's first wife in the film. She also starred in the *Twilight* series of films.

"I'd hit a wall shortly after I did my first acting job," she said. "I asked people who I should study with and I was told to go to see Jacqueline.

"And after my first five weeks doing a workshop with her, I went to an audition and the casting director chased me out of the room and asked me what happened to me."

Jessica Paré, the young French Canadian secretary in the popular television series *Mad Men*, who shocked viewers by becoming the newest Mrs. Don Draper, was another one of McClintock's students. Her song and dance performance on the show, *Zou Bisou Bisou*, even made her an instant YouTube sensation.

McClintock also privately coached industry professionals including Canadian director Atom Egoyan.

McClintock died of lung cancer in Toronto on August 23, four months after she was diagnosed. She was 55.

Jacqueline McClintock was the 10th and youngest child born to a French-Canadian mother, Elianne Rodrigue, and an Irish-Canadian father, Donald McClintock, in Saint-Georges-de-Beauce, Que., a rural community south of Quebec City. Her father was a lumberjack and carpenter.

When Jacqueline was 18 months old, her father was killed in a car accident. Her mother couldn't cope and was taken to hospital for a time. She sent the baby to live with her McClintock in-laws in Montreal who had



At TIFF in 2010, three of Jacqueline McClintock's protégés stepped onto the red carpet.

recently lost their own infant daughter.

Jacqueline was placed in their dead daughter's room, near a portrait of the cherished baby. According to her friend Gavin Drummond, she was this child's replacement.

"It's like something out of Dickens," Drummond said. "Then the aunt who first took care of her died and Jacqueline had to go and live with somebody else in the McClintock family."

She was still too young for kindergarten.

When Jacqueline turned six her luck changed in the shape of Aunt Irene McClintock, who became her beloved surrogate mother. This single aunt supported herself, and Jacqueline, on a meagre secretary's wages.

Jacqueline attended schools in Montreal neighbourhoods Longueuil and Notre-Dame-de-Grâce and graduated from Marymount High School. It was here she met David MacDonald, a high school senior who spotted her sitting on the front porch of her aunt's home. He thought she looked like the saddest girl he had ever seen. They started dating and never left each other's side until her death.

While her nine siblings were thickly rooted in the Québécois culture and French language, and always had a huge brood of playmates, Jacqueline grew up in Montreal and rarely saw her mother or siblings. She was raised as a single child in an anglophone enclave.

Drummond is convinced McClintock's early tragedies and

losses made her a great student of life with great interest in the expressions and nuances of honest human connections.

"She always had to assess the situation, understand people's motivations, figure out where she fit in ... this was the seed to her becoming so incredible at reading human behaviour."

Although her birth mother was still alive (she died in 2010), McClintock self-identified as an orphan. She even called her independent theatre company, where she directed performances, held readings, and gave acting lessons, L'Atelier Orphanspace.

Early in her career, McClintock confided to a theatre director that she was an orphan. "Darling," he said, "We are all orphans in the theatre."

She finally found a home.

McClintock's theatre training began at the Dome Theatre at Dawson College, Bishop's University, and the film program at Concordia University. But her greatest inspiration came in 1998, when she studied acting under the esteemed American coach Sanford Meisner at the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York.

Meisner was one of the most influential acting teachers of the 20th century, shaping the careers of Gregory Peck, Diane Keaton, Alec Baldwin, Naomi Watts and a score of others.

His renowned technique, later adapted by McClintock, was summed up by Meisner in this way: "Acting is behaving truthfully under imaginary circumstances."

He developed a style meant to

encourage actors to get out of their heads; to stop thinking about what they were doing and become more spontaneous in the moment in order to hone their performances.

But unlike Meisner, who also famously said "fuck polite," McClintock's translation of the Meisner technique protected people from bullying or manipulation. Instead, she encouraged a strong connection between the actors on stage and honest reactions to subtexts between personalities at the same time as voicing the script.

"She made us tell the truth in an industry where it's full of yes people and where acting coaches have a tendency to pander to their students," said Lefevre.

"As a result she exposed every single one of your nerves, which is what makes great actors, when you're raw and exposed."

If you're doing it right, she added, it makes you want to take your clothes off.

As a teacher, McClintock was terrifyingly perceptive in a casual way. She didn't even need to speak the same language as her students. Case in point: she didn't speak German, but she taught in German.

"This is really difficult for people to understand," Drummond said, "but she's not really listening to what they're saying; she's listening to whether they mean it or not."

"She'd hear it in their voice. And she'd know it from a mile away. She'd shut her eyes and you could wrap her up like Houdini and she'd still be able to tell

you whether she believed that moment or not, what you were saying."

As a director, McClintock staged productions with a goal to showcase strong performances for women.

One such project was *Women on the Verge*, two one-act plays featuring women confronting child-custody issues and wife abuse.

McClintock referred to these roles as David Mamet for women. "They've got big, gutsy characters who dramatize their lives. They're working-class, blue-collar girls ... (who) get to play the full range of emotion."

Another time, she won strong praise for her direction of Tennessee Williams's *Laura* in *The Glass Menagerie*.

"She's simply the most wonderful *Laura* I've ever seen," wrote a Montreal Gazette film reviewer. "She's sincere, diaphanous and inescapably touching."

As a female actor in a male-dominated industry, Lefevre also experienced McClintock's encouragement.

"She told me that because I was pretty, people were going to want to cast me all the time as the girlfriend or the love interest, and that I was more than that, and that she saw more than that in me."

Strong women? They say it takes one to know one.

Or to teach one to be one.

McClintock leaves her partner, David Ross MacDonald, her cousin in Gerry Cameron, and her sister Irene McClintock.

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LIVES LIVED

Victor was born to Korean | able to call him for dinner | Children's Hospital, followed by | Lead and ...