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MCCORD'S MULTIPLE TALENTS ON DISPLAY IN NEW CHAPBOOKS

You might say Terri McCord draws inspiration, literally.

An accomplished poet, she is also a practicing visual artist whose artwork appears in several collections across South Carolina. The cover of her new poetry chapbook, *The Art & The Wait*, features her own drawing, and she has painted the cover for a second book, *In the Company of Animals*.

"I am thrilled to be able to submit my own cover art to accompany the text. It isn't a hard fit for me because my visual art so often parallels my writing, so the subject matter connects easily," she says. "I guess, because I am a visual artist as well, I am obsessed with how each of us 'sees' things in a unique way."

Finishing Line Press, an award-winning small press that publishes no more than four percent of the manuscripts submitted annually, chose to publish McCord's *The Art & The Wait* in the spring. The South Carolina Poetry Initiative selected *In the Company of Animals* for an award and publication this fall through Stepping Stones Press.

Both chapbooks were entries in contests, a path to publication that McCord recommends.

- "Poetry is a hard business, [and] like it or not, publishing now involves entering contests. It is not profitable for a publisher to produce a volume of poetry. We aren't going to see a blockbuster movie made of a book of poetry."

Born in Nashville, Tenn., McCord earned her bachelor's degree in English in 1986 from Furman, where she won several poetry prizes. She finished her Master of Fine Arts degree in poetry from Queens University in Charlotte.

The South Carolina Arts Commission awarded her the Literary Arts Fellowship in poetry in 2002. She has received grants and scholarships from the Metropolitan Arts Council and the Emrys Foundation in Greenville.

Some of her recent work appears in two state poetry anthologies: *The Millennial Sampler of South Carolina* from Ninety-Six Press and *Twenty/South Carolina Poetry Fellows* from Hub City Press. (To learn more about her work, visit www.southernartistry.org/Terri_McCord.)

"I am incredibly visual, so many of my poems are

like paintings — imagistic. And many of my paintings tell stories — are narrative. They work perfectly together," McCord says.

For example, her poem, "National Museum of Health and Medicine" in *The Art & The Wait*, refers to an actual museum at Walter Reed Hospital and an exhibit that rivals Ripley's Believe it or Not.

"The poem centers on an actual human hairball on exhibit, and in the poem I fabricate a story behind the hairball — why a young girl wanted to eat her hair over and over — and in the bigger scheme of things, compulsions that we all have. The exhibit was so morbidly fascinating, though, that I didn't want it to be just something gross; I actually wanted it to become a 'work of art.' And the poem ends with 'leaving her empty with the weight/of wanting to do it again.' "

Another poem, "Conditions," has as its theme the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. "I wanted something positive to come of this horrible disaster, and I heard a true story about how two dogs were saved from the waters," McCord says.

"Which is one of the reasons I write; it is how I process and interpret the world, and not to sound too corny, but I try to elevate the subject matter into something beautiful or positive or transcendent."

To avoid creating in a vacuum, McCord belongs to several critique groups. "Working as a poet is often a solitary process — at least until the sharing of the work comes about," she says. "I read. I write. I observe. The world is a fascinating place; people are fascinating. And nature is endlessly ripe. I constantly observe nature and various landscapes, and I observe people. And I try to see what is going on."

— MINDY FRIDDLE

Reprinted with permission from the May 2, 2008 issue of The Greenville Journal. Mindy Friddle, a 1986 alumna, is the recipient of a 2008-09 Individual Artist Fellowship Award in Prose from the S.C. Arts Commission. Her second novel, Secret Keepers, is scheduled for release in 2009 by St. Martin's Press. Visit www.mindyfriddle.com.



Conditions

after Hurricane Katrina

One retriever and one sheltie swim
a parameter of swelling water
above a yard they knew well
by quick shocks to the neck.
Collarless now, they graze the roof pitch
and follow a submerged sidewalk.

They remember a red ball
thrown to the fence
as their mouths try to grasp unending liquid.
When the boat shows, they are each shredding
the skin of the other — oscillating as life buoys.
They remember only to obey.

In turn, they puncture,
deflate with fatigue and hunger,
the need to please; the skin shrinks and bleeds.
The dogs bob, one almost drowning the other,
for how many hours
the boatman has no guess.

He crosses an invisible line
as he pulls them in,
when they collapse weightless,
almost bodiless,
but twitch right at the yard's edge,
over the forbidden road that no longer exists.

They remember, then, they love each other,
lick off the water,
and the craft disappears.