

COVER STORY

North Shore rising talent

Winnetka native,
NT grad makes
name for herself in
Hollywood

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From the moment Maddie McCormick could speak, she longed for a life on stage entertaining others. Now, nearly 25 years later, the Winnetka native is doing just that — living out her dream of being a Hollywood actor.

“Since I was 4 years old, I told my parents, ‘I’m going to move to L.A. and I’m going to be an actress,’ and so that’s exactly what I did,” said McCormick, who has moved from beginnings on the small stage in Lake Forest to the bright lights of Los Angeles.

McCormick’s acting career sprang from a humble start on the local theater scene, first joining the Lake Forest Children’s Theatre in first grade and later the Children’s Theatre of Winnetka in fourth grade.

“Doing the Children’s Theatre of Winnetka plays was like, my dream,” she said. “I’ll never forget the first time I got in to one of the shows because it was such a rigorous audition process for a 10-year-old.”

The first show McCormick did in Winnetka was the musical “Good News,” loving her experience with the company so much that she stayed until graduating from Carleton Washburne School.

Once she started high school at New Trier, McCormick immersed herself in the various arts programs the school offered as well as outside of school, taking

summer improv classes at Chicago’s Second City and the Piven Theatre Workshop in Evanston.

“Pretty much every minute I wasn’t in school I was acting,” she said.

At New Trier, McCormick says her theater experience helped prepare for a future career of tough auditions and multifaceted acting, giving her a unique advantage over her Hollywood peers.

“Some of my New Trier auditions were stressful, even just as stressful as auditions when there’s money on the line,” she said. “The really amazing thing about New Trier is that they stress craft and excellence over success which I think really serves you in the real world and it’s more how British and Australian actors are trained, to pursue the craft as opposed to the accolades. I really think it gave me a different, grounded approach to acting.”

After graduating from New Trier in 2009, McCormick moved to Los Angeles to chase her dream of becoming a professional actor. However, she promised her parents she would obtain a college degree, enrolling at UCLA.

“I knew that I wanted to come out here right away and start working in the industry,” McCormick said. “I always wanted to do TV/film and wanted to go to school concurrently.”

Upon graduating in 2013 with a degree in psychology and a minor in film, McCormick jumped into the acting world full-time, doing everything from a FedEx commercial to starring in short film roles and TV pilots.

Three years ago, McCormick played the role of Lucy in a pilot for MTV directed by Zach Braff called “Self Promotion,” a dark comedy/mystery-type show that did not end up being picked up by the network.

“It was a little too dark for MTV at that time and very gritty and fell slightly out of their demographic,” McCormick said. “[But] working with Zach was amazing because he’s obviously an actor first and foremost, so he really gets it, and [the pilot] was really great to work with in that sense.”

Earlier this year, McCormick had a leading role in the feature film “Camera Store,” which debuted in theaters earlier this year and starred John Larroquette, John Rhys-Davies and Cheryl Ladd. The dark comedy centers on denizens of a camera store coming to terms with their personal problems.

For the movie, McCormick played a 16-year-old runaway and moved to New Orleans for two months of production.

“It was pretty amazing the talent I was working with,” she said about the film’s experience.

Most recently, McCormick is starring in an HBO pilot called “F**ked Up,” which follows two college roommates and their antics during the first day of college. One roommate, played by Mallory Low, is an Asian nerd who is determined to lose her virginity on the first night of school, and McCormick plays her bratty roommate who just came to college to be a party and find a sorority.

“My character is very dry, very sarcastic, tells it like it is and she was so much fun to play because Mallory is so much fun to work off of,” McCormick said. “We’re just such good opposites for each other.”

For now, the pilot is available to watch on HBO Go and HBO Now, where HBO will track viewer numbers to gauge popularity before possibly turning the show into a full-season production.

As for the characters she plays, McCormick says she most often depicts sarcastic and intelligent characters, enjoying acting in both comedic and dramatic roles.

“Most of the roles [I’m] pretty fast-talking and thinking five steps ahead, and the common theme is some sort of wit and intelligence,” she said. “Those are the characters I find most interesting.”

When asked whether the field of acting is harder today than in the past because of the prevalence of social media and streaming services, McCormick says things are both easier and harder for various reasons.

“It’s easier than ever before to make your own content and put yourself out there, but there’s more competition then ever before now, and you’re competing with Instagram and YouTube stars,” she said. “Right now, we’re in the golden age of television. There are so many wonderful actors, writers, directors, storytellers that are collaborating together that are creating these amazing pieces and amazing stories and it’s a very collaborative art.”

Additionally, McCormick ensures she keeps



Maddie McCormick, a Winnetka native and 2009 New Trier graduate, has worked for the past eight years to build a career in TV and film. PHOTOS SUBMITTED



McCormick recently starred in the movie “Camera Store,” where she moved to New Orleans for filming.

afloat of the drama and traps of partying in Hollywood by surrounding herself with a strong community of fellow actors and maintaining close ties with family and friends.

“I have been studying out here with Lesly Kahn & Company and it’s a really amazing community of actors that work hard and support each other and keep us grounded,” she said. “It pushes you to work harder and pursue your craft.”

And, while Hollywood is 2,000 miles away from home, McCormick fondly

remembers her start on the North Shore, not wanting to trade in her hometown for anywhere else.

“[The local theater scene] has totally shaped my life,” she said. “I feel so lucky that the Winnetka community and Lake Forest community and North Shore in general have a strong arts program and New Trier as well. You don’t see that everywhere and it prepares you so amazingly well for the real world.”

To follow McCormick, visit her website, maddiemccormick.com.