



Lisa Law with her current bus, Silver.
Photograph by Dana Waldon, 2005.

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Lisa Law

With Robert Wilder

Lisa Law is an award-winning photographer and documentary filmmaker who has chronicled the social and cultural changes in America for more than forty years. She is the author of *Flashing on the Sixties*, which she made into a one-hour documentary of the same name, and *Interviews with Icons*, which are the interviews from her award-winning film. She lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in a small adobe house surrounded by an organic vegetable garden, fruit trees, a tipi, and her psychedelic bus, Silver. It's a life she labels "holistic living."

Wilder: What defining moment or moments made you choose photography as your art and profession?

Law: My father, who was a furrier, was a 16-millimeter man as well, and he documented what was important to him. He helped unionize the garment industry in LA and filmed the strikers being hosed down by the police when they were striking in front of Warner Brothers in Burbank. He also filmed his wild boar hunting and fishing trips in Mexico. He gave me a little Brownie about the age of seven, which used 120 film, and I started documenting my life. I was following in his footsteps. I have every single negative from the age of eleven on. When I was twenty, Frank Werber, the manager of the Kingston Trio, gave me a Honeywell Pentax, which I used till I bought a Nikon F in 1964.

I took a course in photography at the College of Marin, in Kentfield, California, and that's when I learned how to do portraits and began to photograph the groups Frank managed: the Kingston Trio, the We Five, and the Sons of Champlin. I went to the Beatles concert at the Cow Palace in 1965 with one of his staff, Jon Sagen, who had backstage passes. The kids were screaming their heads off and trying to get to the stage. We were right in front of the stage and backstage with the Beatles, and I was able to get some good close-up shots. It was very exciting. At that point I began to document everything I was doing.

Wilder: When did what you were doing in terms of photography turn into activism?

Law: I was always an activist. It runs in my family. My mother, Selma; my father, Lee; and my Aunt Elaine were major activists for human rights. I have a lot of photographs, which are in my shows, of the march against the Vietnam War in 1967, in San Francisco, and Coretta Scott King and the Black Panthers speaking out against the war at Kezar Stadium in Golden Gate Park. I photographed Allen Ginsberg and Vincent Hallinan, the head of the ACLU, marching that day, too. I was thinking that the title of my next book should be *Running Backwards*, because photographers who are documenting are always running backwards to get what they need. I actually have pictures and articles about me from 1964. I was going to San Francisco City College and working at Weinstein's Department Store, selling thirty-nine-cent hosiery, when I got involved in a demonstration. Behind the store was a post office. We were demonstrating against the testing of nuclear bombs in the Canary Islands. I would sit on the steps with my guitar and sing "We Shall Overcome" and "If I Had a Hammer," all those kinds of resistance songs. One day a woman came up and asked to use my guitar. It was Joan Baez! That was such an honor.

One of the most important events I was involved in was in 1990 when I helped make a documentary on the El Salvadoran resistance against military oppression. I was with Pastors for Peace, and we drove fourteen truckloads of aid to El Salvador. I also worked for years documenting the Navajo and Hopi nations struggling to preserve their ancestral religious sites, traditions, and land. I was the head of Big Mountain defense for twelve years here in Santa Fe and organized marches and demonstrations and raised money for Big Mountain Weavers, who were resisting the relocation of 10,000 Dine [Navajo people], because Peabody Coal Company wanted to strip-mine for coal.

Wilder: How did you earn a living as you worked on becoming a photographer?

Law: I could sew, I produced special events, and I could cook. In '69, I helped feed 200,000 people at Woodstock with the Hog Farm Commune. I catered the Aquarian Theater opening in LA with all organic food. I was an organic farmer. I sold door-to-door, homegrown fruits and vegetables, eggs, bread,

cheese, and yogurt that we made at our farm in Truchas. I would also come down to the plaza and set up a booth during arts and crafts day. The booth was made from old wagon hoops. [My ex-husband] Tom made it for me. It was all nailed together so I could hang all my plants on the crossbars from metal hangers. I would collect succulents and pot them, and make gorgeous succulent flower arrangements that I grew in our greenhouse. Some times I would make \$350 by the end of the day. I did a lot of different jobs to make enough money to raise our four kids, and so did Tom. I cleaned houses and sold Shaklee and Amway products.

When Tom and I broke up in 1977, I worked at the French Pastry Shop at the La Fonda Hotel, saved \$1,000, and drove with the kids to California via Gallup, where I bought \$1,000 worth of Pendleton blankets and turquoise jewelry. I had a big sale at musician Robbie Robertson's house in Malibu and made two grand off of it. I then bought a car and came back to Santa Fe and sold it for another thousand. I ended up with three thousand and started my own business.

As the kids were growing up and we needed extra money, I would get jobs in the movies with the kids. We were in *Silverado*, *The Lone Ranger*, *Wild Times*, *Lust in the Dust*, *Time Rider*, *Young Guns*, and *Road Scholar*. In fact, if you look at the previews of *Time Rider*, my daughter Sunday is very scared because she sees this motorcycle in an old western town way before motorcycles were invented. You see me walking across in front of a church with the preacher with his arm around me as he tries to console me. We were in a lot of different films. While we were on the sets, I would photograph everything. I shot Emilio Estevez and Kiefer Sutherland in *Young Guns*, and Kevin Costner, Kevin Kline, Scott Glenn, and Danny Glover in *Silverado*. So I've got all those pictures of all the films being made. I'd just put my camera underneath my coat and shoot all the scenes I was in. Sometimes I got the job of still photographer on the set.

Wilder: How do you think raising your children and grandchildren in the sixties culture has shaped them?

Law: When we moved here from California forty years ago this year, we ended up settling down in Truchas, where we grew our own food and alfalfa for our goats and horses. I made goat cheese and yogurt. We grew our own wheat and made waffles, bread, and bagels. We grew lots of vegetables too. Truchas

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has the greatest weather for growing: broccoli, onions, leeks, peas, beans, carrots, corn, cabbage—huge Dutch cabbages, pumpkins, squash, zucchinis, and five kinds of lettuce, radishes, turnips, beets, and herbs. I would go out every morning and milk the goats, strain the milk, nurse a baby, work in the garden, herd the goats, groom the horse, feed the pigeons and ducks, and collect eggs from the chickens. Everything was organic, which helped create a healthy lifestyle for the kids.

Tom and I were advocates for natural childbirth and breastfeeding, which I think is so important. My kids are healthy because of their upbringing. They don't use drugs or alcohol. They all eat good food, and they are all very spiritual. I keep track of all my kids. At least twice a week I make sure to talk to or e-mail every one of them. They're all good thinkers and into planting, recycling, permaculture, sustainable living, and being holistic. They are Green Revolutionaries. I couldn't ask for more from my kids. I'm very proud of them.

Wilder: *There are so many places you could have gone, Mexico or San Francisco. What keeps you in Santa Fe?*

Law: Thirty-seven thousand negatives, slides, and 80,000 digital files [laughs]. I find my images tell stories about our history, so I have become somewhat of an historian. They are used in documentaries, books, and magazines, and I am invited to give lectures as well. The Museum of American History at the Smithsonian has a large collection, and now the museums of New Mexico are starting to collect, which thrills me, as I have documented lifestyles and so many events here in the state. I would love to see a Museum of the Sixties in Santa Fe. It was a very important era that planted many seeds for what is important today and deserves to be represented under one roof.

As for the present, I get involved a lot with what this state stands for, and I feel I make a difference with my activism. My values seem to have a positive impact on others, and that means a lot to me. I also insist on our policy makers being honest and forthright, as the future of the planet depends on that. For entertainment I am captivated by the Lannan Foundation, the Lensic Performing Arts Center, the Film Center, the CCA [Center for Contemporary Arts], and The Screen. They offer so many musical, film, and educational events. We are blessed to

have KSFR radio with Mary-Charlotte [Domandi], Democracy Now, and its other great programming, and I start each day listening to Thom Hartmann and Randi Rhodes on Air America, because I get the real news as it is happening. We have so many great activist groups that let their voices be heard. And I am very excited about the Warehouse 21, the Railyard Park, and our new Farmer's Market. In the four decades I have been here I have made so many friends whom I love dearly, and relating to them daily is a big plus for me.

Besides all of this, you can't match the weather in this state. Each season is so special. In the summertime I float down the Rio Grande every weekend, weather permitting, and for the last two summers I have gone down with my grandkids in inner tubes. We sit in the inner tubes and float downstream for about an hour. The scenery is beautiful, and there are ducks, cranes, sheep, and peacocks, and sometimes beavers. When we go by one group of houses on the river where we know there are peacocks, the kids and I cry out, "Peacock! Peacock!" and they answer our calls. My grandkids are totally into relating to the animals and the plants and the beauty.

But the main thing that drew me to northern New Mexico and keeps me here is the influence of the Native American culture and spirituality. I think I may have been an Indian in a past life. I feel very much at home here. ■

See a selection of Lisa Law's photography in "In the Collections," page 30; "Frame Work," page 80; and on the Web site for Photo Archives, Palace of the Governors/New Mexico History Museum, Santa Fe.

Robert Wilder's essays have appeared in *Newsweek*, *Details*, *Salon*, and *Creative Nonfiction*. He teaches English at Santa Fe Preparatory School, and his column "Daddy Needs a Drink" is published monthly in the *Santa Fe Reporter*. His first book, *Daddy Needs a Drink*, was released in paperback in May. His second, *Tales from the Teachers' Lounge*, was published by Delacorte last fall. Photo by Jennifer Esperanza.

