

Renew

FEATURE:

The Power of Awe

PAGE 20

Creative Eats

Take a mix-and-match approach in the kitchen

Diving In

The health perks of water activities

Gerald McRaney

The veteran actor on the art of acting, staying healthy and looking forward to tomorrow

PAGE 16



A creative approach to living healthier

PAGE 4

A photograph of a wooden wall with a ladder leaning against it and a large industrial fan in the foreground.

“Call
Me

Mac”

Gerald McRaney's

career as an actor has resonated with generations of TV fans — and he's still going strong

By *Julie Kendrick*

Photos by *Jeff Lipsky*

When fans approach him for an autograph or picture, Gerald McRaney says he can usually predict exactly which of his many roles they're going to want to talk about. The secret, he says, is their age. "If they're around my age or older (he's 74), they'll ask about *Simon & Simon*. If they're middle-aged, they'll want to talk about *Major Dad*. And younger folks tend to be interested in *Deadwood* or *This is Us*. But sometimes those younger ones will surprise me, because they've seen one of my earlier roles in reruns. I'm being exposed to whole new audiences for stuff I did ages ago." So, if you're looking at his photograph here and thinking, "I know I've seen him in something before," you're probably right.

The plainspoken actor, who asks to be called simply Mac, has a career that includes more than 800 film and TV jobs, beginning with a low-budget horror film in 1969. He then moved on to television classics like *Night Gallery* ➔



and *Gunsmoke*. He's been a regular on shows like *Mike & Molly* and *House of Cards*. Today, he's playing retired Navy Admiral Hollace Kilbride in *NCIS: Los Angeles*, a show that's now in its thirteenth season. In addition to being a fan favorite, he's received industry recognition, winning an Emmy in 2017 for his guest actor role as Dr. Nathan Katowski in *This is Us*.

These days, he's content with being a member of an ensemble instead of the leading man. "I much prefer the way things are now," he says. "I can't think of many people in their mid-70s who are still working at a job they look forward to doing, so I know I'm lucky."

■ From Sideline to Spotlight

Mac's career started, dramatically enough, with an accident. "I injured my knee playing football in ninth

Clockwise from left: Gerald McRaney attending the 2017 Governors Ball with wife Delta Burke after winning an Emmy; addressing Marines and sailors about to deploy aboard the USS Ogden in San Diego in late 2001; with costar Chelsea Hertford in *Major Dad*.

grade," he recalls. While he was recuperating, someone suggested he help the drama club build sets for an upcoming play since his dad was a carpenter. However, Mac was ultimately asked to be in the cast. His character was a person with dwarfism, even though "I was a full six feet tall," he laughs. "So my skills were challenged right away."

After leaving the University of

Mississippi following his sophomore year, McRaney headed to New Orleans. There, he spent half a year working as a mud logger in the Louisiana oil fields. The other half, he was a cast member for a repertory theater company. When the company folded, he made his way to Los Angeles. "I decided if I starved, at least it would be in a warm climate," he says.

■ The Art in Acting

After arriving in L.A., Mac enrolled in acting classes with famed teacher Jeff Corey, who inspired him to see how acting fit into the larger world (and history) of art, in all its forms. "He talked about the cave paintings in Lascaux, France, and pointed out that as soon as the tribe had been fed, people needed to make drawings about the hunt. Art is just that necessary to us as humans. It was true 20,000 years ago when they were making those paintings, and it's still true today."

History buff McRaney quotes Winston Churchill about the necessity of keeping art in our lives, even — or especially — in trying times: "When he was asked to cut arts funding in favor of the war effort, he replied, 'Then what are we fighting for?'"

■ A Sense of Dedication

As his ability to offhandedly quote Churchill might indicate, McRaney has a passion for the military and an unwavering dedication to supporting the troops. "When I was growing up, a lot of the men in my life were veterans, including my scoutmaster, football coaches and family members who had fought in WWII and Korea," he says. "I grew up with a sense of responsibility to help them wherever I could."

He's visited troops all over the world,

Photos (clockwise from upper left): by Richard Shotwell/Invision/AP, by David McNew/Getty Images, by CBS via Getty Images



“What’s important to me are my family, my country and my work.”

—Gerald McRaney

including USO visits to Somalia, Haiti, Saudi Arabia and Bosnia, and by invitation, he even spent a Thanksgiving in the Mediterranean with the Sixth Fleet of the U.S. Navy.

In addition to volunteering with the USO and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), McRaney is an official celebrity spokesperson for the Wounded Warrior Project. “What’s important to me are my family, my country and my work,” he says. “I want to do whatever I can, when I’m asked. I wish I had time to do more.”

■ **Staying Active, On and Off Camera**

A working actor who just keeps on working, McRaney knows it’s important to stay in shape. “I’m not a big health freak, but part of enjoying life is being healthy,” he says. “It’s not pleasant if you spend your time feeling bad. I do a little exercise every day, including walking, stationary biking and Indian clubs, which I taught myself how to use. It’s just enough

so that I can enjoy life, and I’ve been lucky that way.”

While he’s feeling great now, McRaney has battled health issues over the years. In 2004, he underwent surgery to remove a cancerous growth from his lung. “I had been a smoker for 40 years, but it just so happened that I’d quit about three months prior,” he says. And during a recent annual physical, McRaney discovered that he has Type 2 diabetes. He’s been controlling it with daily medication and makes sure to watch his diet as much as he can. “Fortunately, I grew up eating lots of fruits and vegetables, and I like them,” he says. “I’ve never really cared for sweet snacks, so if I’m going to eat a dessert, it has to be a really good one.” He believes that health and fun can coexist. “You don’t have to sacrifice everything enjoyable to have good health. But you really should see your doctor every year, so you can catch things early on.”

■ **The Actor’s Life for Him**

For Mac, life during the pandemic has been calm and, thankfully, healthy. “People were freaking out about being stuck at home, but I would tell them, ‘I’m an actor, so I’m used to being at home without work, waiting for the phone to ring,’” he says. Now fully vaccinated, McRaney praises the stringent health measures that are followed on the *NCIS: Los Angeles* set. “It’s a well-oiled machine, and they’ve been good about executing the right protocols,” he says.

“I usually shoot about three days per episode,” he explains. “I work enough right now to enjoy it. If I have an early call, I get myself up at 4:30 a.m. so I can get a workout in. I drive myself to the studio, which is about half an hour away, and then I work a 10-hour day.”

Those early call times might make some instinctively reach for the snooze button, but McRaney says that a gig this good keeps him eager to work. “I’m having a ball. We have the best crew and the nicest people in the cast. The writing is good. I’m perfectly content. And if you asked me what I was looking forward to, I’d tell you I’m looking forward to tomorrow.” •