

**Wendy Ewald '69, Photographer, Educator, Cultural Explorer, and Researcher**



*Photo by Denise Dixon*

When her husband accepted a job in rural Kentucky in 1974, Wendy Ewald reluctantly left San Francisco for a mining town that lacked even a bookstore. But she wasn't about to sit around and complain. After the 1967 riots, Ewald had volunteered to teach in Detroit schools; the following summer, she taught photography to children on an Innu reserve in Labrador, Canada. It only seemed natural to offer to teach photography in Whitesburg as well. Little did Ewald know that her Literacy Through Photography (LTP) program—funded by the Kentucky Education Board—would grow into an international collaborative art project. Ewald was experimenting with photography by age 10. She realized its true

power after her younger brother was injured in a car accident: using an image-based game she created, he was able to regain his speech.

Ewald credits Wendy MacNeil, her “sensational” photography teacher at Abbot Academy, with turning her into a truly avid photographer and inspiring her to spend the summer before Antioch College on a reservation in Eastern Canada teaching children how to use cameras. Ewald soon realized that their boldness in taking pictures of anything—no matter how disturbing, strange, or socially unacceptable—dramatically enhanced what each image seemed to “say” to the viewer. Who actually “makes” the photograph—the photographer or his subject? Ewald asked herself.

Her Appalachian endeavor—to genuinely capture the rural Kentucky way of life through images and writings created by children—would last until 1982 and be published in *Portraits and Dreams* (1985), the first of Ewald's many compilation projects. More than 50 years later, LTP continues to thrive as she collaborates with people around the world to express identity and cultural diversity. The resulting images frequently are displayed in art galleries or in Ewald's themed publications, such as the “American Alphabets” series, where each letter of the alphabet is represented by a term or image from a select community, forming a Spanish Alphabet, African-American Alphabet, and, in 2001, a White Girl's Alphabet created by Phillips Academy girls. Other publications include *In Peace and Harmony: Carver Portraits* (2006), and *Secret Games: Collaborative Works with Children 1969–1999* (2000). Ms. Ewald's last three books were published by MACK in London and her film, *Portraits and Dreams* is available on PBS/POV. Ms. Ewald's current projects include an archive and a book of her life's work.

In Ms. Ewald's words, “In my work with children and women I encourage them to use cameras to look at their own lives, their families and their communities, and to make images of their fantasies and dreams. While making my own photographs in the communities, I ask my collaborators to alter my images by drawing or writing on them,

challenging the concept of who actually makes the image – who is the photographer, who is the subject, who is the observer and who is the observed. My work questions the conventional definition of individual authorship and casts into doubt an artist's intentions, power and identity.”