



Instamatic Karma: Photographs of John Lennon

By May Pang

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"There were times I was a bit reticent in taking out my camera, like when some 'old friends' stopped by to hang out. I didn't want to intrude on these moments, but John insisted. He felt that I captured him in ways that no one else did because of his comfort level with me...For years, only my closest friends got to see these photos-which were literally tucked away in a shoebox in my closet. They were surprised that these images did not convey the John that was portrayed in the press during our time together. In fact, they saw a side of John seldom seen."-
From INSTAMATIC KARMA

John Lennon is the most famously photographed Beatle-everyone from Iain MacMillian to Annie Leibowitz took iconic images of him-but there have never been pictures of him like these taken by May Pang, Lennon's girlfriend from 1973 to 1975. In INSTAMATIC KARMA, they're collected for the first time. With very few exceptions, these photos are that rare thing: never-before-seen images of an icon. The photos here show Lennon in a variety of settings: at work, at play, at home, and away. They show a playful Lennon, a casual, unguarded Lennon; they're the kind of photos one lover takes of another. May has written rich captions to accompany her photos--taken together, they tell a simple story of the time May and Lennon spent together; a time, according to legend, when Lennon was unhappy and unproductive, estranged from his family and bandmates. Pang's photos clearly tell another story-they show Lennon clowning around, working on his hit album "Walls and Bridges", embracing old friends and family, hanging out in their apartment on Manhattan's East 52nd Street, relaxing in the country in upstate New York or spending peaceful days swimming in the waters of Long Island.

The photographs in INSTAMATIC KARMA are both color and black & white, casual Polaroids and more composed shots. Each one is an intimate glimpse into a fascinating time in John Lennon's life.

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Editorial Review

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Lennon was famously requested by wife Yoko Ono to have an affair with the couple's personal assistant, May Pang, while on sabbatical from the marriage. Apparently, Pang had a camera, but the biggest wonder is that no book of her photos appeared until now. The pictures show Lennon at a time of estrangement and personal excess (drink and drugs). The latter may be inferred from the cheery shot of Lennon with surprisingly fresh-faced Bobby Keys, who played the sax lead on the hit "Tequila" as a teen and became Keith Richards' dedicated imbibing partner. Other photos touch on underappreciated facets of Lennon's life: he and son Julian, then about 10, cavort in the water; Julian dresses up in John's clothes—all very homey, as are shots of Lennon and Pang exuding domestic bliss. Not out to foment scandal, Pang comments about Lennon's recording activities and personal concerns of the time very gently. Great for fans and desirable if not essential for biographical reference. And finally, how can libraries go wrong acquiring anything about any Beatle? --Mike Tribby

About the Author

MAY PANG worked for ABKCO, the Beatles' management company, in the early 1970's, and from there was hired as John Lennon and Yoko Ono's personal assistant. After her relationship with Lennon ended, Pang worked for Island Records and United Artists. In addition to photography, she designs a line of feng shui jewelry and furniture. She lives in New York with her two children.

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at home

california, here we come

Shortly after John and I got together, he decided we would go to Los Angeles for a while. We hopped on a flight with "Uncle" Harold Seider, John's lawyer and trusted advisor from the Allen Klein/ABKCO days (John had hired Harold after he left ABKCO, which came in handy in John's lawsuit against Klein). Harold graciously offered us his apartment and found somewhere else to stay. He knew better than anyone that John had no spending money! We soon met up with two of John's old friends: Rolling Stone Bill Wyman and the Stones' ex-manager, Andrew Loog Oldham. Hanging out with Andrew was always good fun. He was staying at legendary producer Lou Adler's house in Bel Air (Lou had another place in Malibu). Since Andrew would only be in L.A. a few more days, he suggested we ask Lou if we could use the place. We'd put Harold out long enough, so we thought it was a good idea. We didn't know Lou, so Andrew arranged it for us. We ended up staying there close to two months. These pictures, taken poolside at Adler's house, are the first I took of our time together.

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Users Review

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