



Local Teen Actress Shares Experience Filming 'Canvas'

By [Gary White](#)

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Many actors are known as chameleons. They gain or lose weight, wear elaborate makeup or prosthetic devices or otherwise alter their appearance, speech and mannerisms until the person up on the movie screen bears little resemblance to the actual person.

Sophia Bairley didn't undergo any such visual transformation for her role in the movie "Canvas," yet when she first saw the film, she felt as if she were watching someone else. That's because Sophia was 11 when "Canvas" was filmed, and she's now 13. "When I saw it, I looked a lot different than I do now," said Sophia, a Winter Haven resident. "It's hard to believe it was me."

"Canvas," filmed in and around Fort Lauderdale in the fall of 2005, is finally getting its theatrical release this week, starting with a gala screening Tuesday at Florence Gould Hall in New York. Sophia, temporarily living in Los Angeles to pursue TV and movie auditions, plans to attend a release party for the film in West Hollywood on Friday. Sophia began acting locally at age 7 and has appeared in other small-budget films.

"Canvas" is her first movie to gain national distribution. "Canvas," written and directed by Floridian Joseph Greco, stars Oscar winner Marcia Gay Harden ("Pollock") as Mary Marino, a wife and mother with a severe mental illness. Her husband is played by Joe Pantoliano, nicknamed "Joey Pants," known for his roles in "The Matrix" and "Memento" and his recurring part as Ralph Cifaretto on "The Sopranos."

Sophia portrays Dawn, a friend of the Marinos' young son, Chris (Devon Gearhart). "She's kind of like comedic relief in the movie," Sophia said by phone from Los Angeles. "She's really sweet and a really good friend to Chris. She's a real easygoing girl." Sophia said she shot one scene with Harden, one of Hollywood's most respected actresses.

"She was really great; she was always in character and very focused," Sophia said. "She kind of kept to herself, and in between scenes she would kind of talk to us a bit and then get back into it. It was really interesting to watch her get into character."

As young as she is, Sophia knew not to ask Harden about her Oscar. "It was really cool, but whenever you're around someone you don't really think about that," she said. "You just kind of talk to them. Just working with them, they're just regular people. But yeah, I really admire her work."

"Canvas" is scheduled for limited distribution, meaning it's uncertain whether it will show in Polk County theaters. But independent, artsy films - for example, "Pollock" and "Memento" - sometimes gain enough acclaim to spawn wider release. "Canvas" has won awards at several film festivals.

"I have a good feeling about it," said Bettina Bairley, Sophia's mother. "It's getting great press. The film's won a lot of awards, the producers have really been promoting it a lot, and it's just a good film." After shooting "Canvas," Sophia ventured to Chicago last year for a role in "The Poker House," the directorial debut of actress Lori Petty. That movie doesn't yet have a release date. Sophia and her mother have been in Los Angeles since August, subletting a Studio City apartment from a touring singer, and plan to return to Winter Haven in November. This is the third straight fall the pair have traveled to Los Angeles, where Sophia has been auditioning for movie and TV roles and doing voice-over work.

"We'll get a call, and it's usually the next day she has to go in," Bettina Bairley said. "The manager will send over her part of the script she has to memorize. She's got to learn her lines, and then if she feels like she needs coaching she'll meet with her manager. If she has a real good feel for the character, she'll go in on her own."

Sophia, an eighth-grader at Winter Haven's Jewett School of the Arts, takes classes online through the **Florida Virtual School** while in Los Angeles. She said she has found a group of friends in Studio City, mostly other show-business kids.

"I love coming out here, but I miss home, too," she said. "It's really nice just to come out here in L.A. for a little while and then go back home, but I miss everybody while I'm out here."

If "Canvas" does well, Sophia might get to watch herself on screen with her Winter Haven friends for the first time. "They ask me, 'Oh, when's it going to come out?'" she said. "I say, 'I have no idea.' I don't really mind because I'm working on other stuff, but yeah, it's always like a lot of anticipation to see it and have everybody else see it."