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Glenwood Springs

Post Independent

A well-told tale of a family torn asunder

Shortsfest honors students' film on kidnapped sister

By Carrie
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Yampah High School student filmmakers Teal Hoffman, left, and Diane Nystrom took top honors for their short film entitled "Missing" at the Aspen Shortsfest.



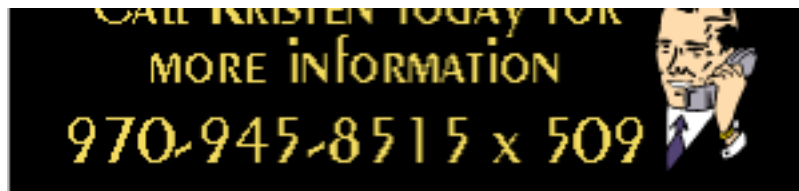
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GLENWOOD SPRINGS — Fifteen-year-old Diane Nystrom remembers the day of her little sister's kidnapping through the eyes of a small child.

That's because Diane was only 5 the last time she saw Nikki, her 3-1/2-year-old half sister.

Just like a little girl's perspective, the specifics are sketchy. She, Nikki and their two brothers were visiting Nikki's father. Diane said she thought his name was George and he was from Mexico. They were in southern California, though she's not sure where.

There were a bunch of apartment buildings and a swimming pool.

Nikki said she needed to go inside to the bathroom. Diane was going to take her inside, but George got huffy and said he'd take her because he had to make a phone call anyway.

George led Nikki away from the pool, and they never came back. Diane thinks they might be in Mexico. Now, almost a dozen years later, the long-term effects of Diane's loss have been formulated in "Missing," a five-minute short film and winner of the Best Film award in the local filmmakers' competition at this week's Aspen Shortsfest.

Diane, who lives in Glenwood Springs and turns 16 next week, and Teal Hoffman, 18, from Carbondale, are both Yampah Mountain High School students, and the filmmakers behind "Missing."

Diane was a freshman and Teal a junior when they met last year in a class called Media Empowerment. The class is offered through filmmaker and educator Alec Raffin and his nonprofit organization, Mpower, which provides a variety of media education courses at Roaring Fork School District high schools.

Teal had previously taken a Mpower advanced filmmaking course, where students learn to develop and produce important video projects.

Both young women decided they wanted to create a film about family and siblings — Diane’s experience with Nikki’s kidnapping, and Teal’s relationship with her brother, who is deaf.

The two became a strong filmmaking team, and as they began developing a story line, they discovered it would be best to focus their short film on Diane.

“It’s about not taking people for granted,” said Diane.

“It’s about wishing that I could have spent more time with my sister.”

“Yeah, my little brother drives me crazy sometimes, but if anything happened to him, I couldn’t stand it,” Teal added.

Making the short

“I was very impressed with the every aspect of their filmmaking, starting with Diane’s willingness to tell this story she has been wanting to tell,” said Raffin.

“Teal dealt with such great sensitivity with Diane’s story. I was also very impressed with their work ethic. They spent countless hours developing the story idea, shooting and editing.”

With Diane contributing much of the story line and

appearing in front of the camera and Teal behind it, they became a strong filmmaking team.

“She’s my aspiring model,” said Teal, with a laugh.

“I’m more into the shooting and editing part of filmmaking. I’m a media girl.”

Diane and Teal said Raffin encouraged and helped them along the way.

“In the credits, we wanted to put his name under everything,” Diane said. “But he wouldn’t let us. He doesn’t let us give him enough credit.”

“We feel really lucky,” Teal added. “We learned a lot.”

A universal feeling

Aspen Shortsfest jurors voted “Missing” the best local film for several reasons, said Aspen Filmfest associate programmer Amy Townsend.

“The jury really liked the filmmakers’ ability to zero in on the subject, and peel away the layers,” Townsend said.

Townsend also said that even though people may not have experienced a family member’s kidnapping and subsequent disappearance, the short resonated the universal feeling of loss.

“‘Missing’ is a very courageous film,” Townsend said.

“It’s extraordinary someone of Diane’s and Teal’s ages could tell such an emotional story in a really honest way.”

Teal said she and Diane were surprised to learn they’d taken local “Best Film” honors at Shortsfest.

“I got a call from Amy and she told me,” said Teal. “I didn’t believe her. I kept saying, ‘No, we didn’t!’ She

had to tell me five times!”

Now, Teal and Diane will be heading up to the Wheeler Opera House in Aspen with a bus of fellow Yampah High School students to screen their short at noon on Wednesday.

The film will also screen at the 5:30 p.m. shorts program on Friday at the Wheeler in Aspen, and Diane and Teal will also be entering the film in the fifth annual Valley-Wide Student Film Fest in Basalt on May 7-8.

The two showed the film at school a few weeks ago, “They liked it,” Diane said. “People told me it was powerful. It makes everybody cry. I’m never in the room when it’s being shown.”

But that will likely change on Wednesday.

“I usually don’t watch it,” Diane said quietly. “But this time I’ll try.”

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local talent

Filmmakers from Aspen to Glenwood Springs submitted 17 short films to the Local Filmmakers Competition at this year’s Aspen Shortsfest. Aspen Filmfest associate programmer Amy Townsend said the four-member jury — Mary Suma, Frankie Welfield, Helen Klanderud and Robert Adams — agreed that the quality of the top three shorts compelled them to create special jury recognition categories.

Local shorts winners:

- Best Film: “Missing” by Diane Nystrom and Teal Hoffman
- Jury recognition for Best Cinematography: “As One” by Terry Glasenapp of Glenwood Springs. “There were such beautiful images in this short,” said Townsend.
- Jury recognition for Most Innovative: “As of Lately” by Ben Phillips of Carbondale. The jury acknowledged Phillips’ edgy style and unique visual mood in his short.

Aspen Shortsfest will offer a 90-minute free public screening of “Local Filmmaker Showcase” of these and other shorts by local filmmakers at noon Wednesday at the Wheeler Opera House, 520 E. Hyman Ave., in Aspen. “Missing” will also screen before “Shorts Program IV” at 5:30 p.m., Friday, April 2, at the Wheeler in Aspen.

Information: Aspen Shortsfest, 925-6882 or www.aspenfilm.org; Mpower, Alec Raffin, 618-3393 or www.mpowerpeople.org.

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