

## Student's film featured at NYC festival

Simone Thomas-Rowe, a West Orange native, made a film that is being shown in a young filmmakers festival in New York City.



Erica Tavia

Photo Credit: Akintayo Adewole

A young boy is caught in the middle of a school shooting.

There is only one person who can calm him down—his mother, but the school shooter turns out to be his brother.

Simone Thomas-Rowe, 20, of West Orange created the film to play with the concept of life passing before one's eyes.

"Before My Eyes" is one of 10 films being screened at this year's "Community Access' Changing Minds Young Filmmaker Festival" which will be held on May 17 at East Village Cinema in New York City.

"School shootings happen so often," said Thomas-Rowe. "They're not approached with care. When I was writing my film, I wanted to take the concept of a school shooting but really focus on the mental health

aspects. Not just a film about a school shooting."

Being an only child, Thomas-Rowe played around with the sibling dynamic for "Before My Eyes."

"I wrote it as one brother got the great grades and things got easy for him. The other brother, who was older, he struggled in school. Mom naturally didn't really pay as much attention to him. She paid attention to the kid who did better. It was interesting to show there's always two sides to the story," Thomas-Rowe said.

Thomas-Rowe is currently in her junior year studying film at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. She comes back to West Orange during the summer and holidays.

She first became interested in film when she was 8 years old, making iMovie trailers on her iPad. "I didn't know you could pursue film as a career," she said.

Thomas-Rowe was also into acting, from grade school to high school.

“I love the idea of bringing a character to life,” she said. “When I went to high school, I wanted to explore more.”

Creating films in high school was awesome for Thomas-Rowe.

“It was really amazing to bring something you wrote to life,” she said. “I always had a wild imagination. Friends would act in films. It was just great to have people around who support you.”

Thomas-Rowe appeared at the first annual Children & Family Emmy Awards to receive on-stage recognition as scholar winner for her short, “Through Your Pane” (2022). The film is about a girl who is experiencing her own hardships at home. She stumbles upon a mother and daughter hugging—which she views through a window. She then goes back every day to observe their lives, wishing she had what that girl had.

“You don’t know what someone else is going through,” said Thomas-Rowe. “You don’t know what’s on the other side. That girl and her mom [through the windowpane] didn’t have a good relationship. She didn’t know what that girl was experiencing.”

Next up for Thomas-Rowe is a psychological thriller called “Mothering Mirrors.”

“I am focusing on telling greater stories, especially with the state of our world and government,” she said. “I have a lot of films in the works.”

When she’s not making films, Thomas-Rowe loves to be with friends.

“We don’t have to be doing anything,” she said. “I love human connection, and I love to laugh. Going to different restaurants and going on long car rides to sing and laugh...the little things.”