

Achievers: Jim Miller, Emeran Irby | Students' films zoom in on beauty

Two take home national prizes

Emeran Irby asked students at South Oldham High School to describe beauty in one word. Jim Miller went on a quest for beauty and learned that it's "hard to find if you look too hard."

Both students filmed their experiences, and both won state and national recognition in the **film** production category of the 2009-10 PTA Reflections contest.

Irby, 18, won an Award of Excellence in the Senior High Division, and Jim, 13, won an Award of Excellence in the Middle School Division.

Irby graduated from South Oldham High School in June, and Jim completed the eighth grade at Noe Middle School in June and will attend Manual High School in the fall.

The National PTA Reflections Program recognizes student achievement in literature, musical composition, photography, visual arts, dance choreography and film (video) production.

Entries are judged first at the local level, with selected works advancing to the district, state and national levels.

In the 2009-10 contest, 133 Kentucky students won either an Award of Excellence or an Award of Merit at the state level. Of those, 24 entries went to the national competition, including eight from the Louisville area.

The other six students who advanced to nationals were featured on this page this summer.

In the national competition, 500,000 entries were judged, 72 won the Award of Excellence and 120 won the Award of Merit at the national level.

Irby and Jim were two of three local students who won the Award of Merit at the national level.

It was Irby's first time entering the PTA Reflections contest. Her broadcast journalism teacher encouraged the class to enter the film production category, and Irby remembers thinking, "I'm doing it!"

She lives in Pewee Valley with her parents, Amy Johnson and Jay Irby, and younger brother Paul.

Irby's film, "Beauty Is ..." — the contest theme — is less than three minutes long. She said she "wanted to do something really interesting and something people would think was cool."

She also wanted to avoid portraying a superficial image of beauty, which she said is often presented in magazines and other media aimed at teenagers.

For the first part of her film, shot in black and white, Irby asked people at her school to describe beauty in one word. Because her broadcast journalism class met at the same time that other students were on lunch break, she was able to pull people out to film their responses.

"It took two good weeks to get" the answers, she said. Her subjects appear again at the end of the film, laughing. That segment was easy to produce because often they "would mess up and laugh," she said.

Next Irby superimposed images. Against the image of a car **driving** away, she set images of her brother playing the bass, basketball players, people with tattoos and children playing.

Irby planned, directed, filmed and edited the film. She doesn't appear in it except for a clip of herself as a child, which she borrowed from home movies.

At the end of the film, her subjects appear again, in color. This time each is again given the prompt, "Beauty is," and they each respond, "me."

Background music for the film is "Daylight" by Matt and Kim, a choice she made carefully, wanting it to be an upbeat film. She said the "music makes" the film and that she is very proud of the result. She said she's made other **films** but nothing "as artistic, as passionate" as this one.

"I wanted to emphasize the whole idea that a young girl shouldn't feel pressure to be what she sees in magazines. You should find beauty in yourself. That's what my mom told me, and I wanted to spread that message. Your imperfections make you beautiful."

Irby plans to study photography and has been accepted at Hanover College in Indiana and Belmont University in Tennessee.

When Jim heard the contest theme, he decided that before he could make a film about beauty, he'd "have to figure out what it is."

"I decided to do it about a kid trying to do a film for PTA Reflections," he said.

Jim, who lives in the Highlands with his parents, Lynne and Fred Miller, and older sister Marietta, portrays the kid on a quest for beauty in his four-minute film.

He learns that "beauty is hard to find if you look too hard," he said. "If you stop looking, beauty will come."

The film, called "Quest for Beauty," features Jim and his classmates Aidan Miles and Emily Kidwell. "We're in drama together and we're friends," he said, adding that he also chose them to participate because he thought it would be easy to get together after school to make the film.

In the opening of the film — shot in black and white — the main character asks family and friends for their ideas, being unsatisfied with his first attempt to make a video.

No one offers much feedback until "Emily gives a pretty good answer," he said. The film concludes with a montage, shot in color, of the boy walking around, finding beauty around him.

Jim shot his film at his house, in his backyard, and at nearby Tyler Park.

Jim created and performed piano accompaniment for the beginning of the film and used "Upside Down" by Jack Johnson to accompany the montage.

Jim made his first film for a school project when he was in sixth grade and said it was a lot of fun.

This is his second time entering a film in the Reflections contest. Last year, he earned an Award of Excellence although his film did not advance to national competition.

He said his favorite part of the process was working with his friends and setting up tripods for the filming.

Both students have posted their films on YouTube. Jim's film can be seen at www.youtube.com/watch?v=j5d14AWP93Y. Irby's can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2_2Kk_gafY.

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Jim Miller

Age: 13

School: Incoming freshman at Manual High School

Hobbies: Making films, soccer, quick recall team, Kentucky Youth Assembly and Kentucky United Nations Assembly



Emeran Irby

Age: 18

School: Graduated in June from South Oldham High School

Hobbies: Photography, field hockey, vice president of French club, traveling

OTHER LOCAL AWARD WINNERS IN FILM PRODUCTION CONTEST

Harrison Wainwright — Meyzeek Middle School, Award of Excellence, Middle

Lauren Moore — South Oldham High School, Award of Excellence, Senior

Joy DeWitt — Ballard High School, Award of Excellence, Senior

Christine Langston — South Oldham High, Award of Merit, Senior

To enter the 2010-11 Reflections contest, contact your school's PTA or PTSA for entry forms, rules and deadlines. This year's theme is "Together We Can."