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SCREEN SCENE: North Lawndale student film debuts at Peace on Earth Festival

By Robert K. Elder

"Gun violence affects me so much that I believe I will be the next person to die," says a teen girl in the short film "Will I Be Next?"

The short, created by a class at North Lawndale College Prep High School, will be part of the first Peace on Earth Film Festival, which starts Friday.

"I woke up and realized I was gettin' old and I had to start doing things on my own," says film editor Raphael Rollins, 19.

Some context here: Rollins was 18 when this epiphany hit him, but he also had been shot as a bystander (once through the wrist, once through the leg) in neighborhood gun violence last year. Rollins, interviewed on camera in "Will I Be Next?," shows his wounds.

"It was a really interesting evolution for him," says his teacher, Elizabeth Czekner. "We had a lot of conversations about it. I don't think he had the opportunity to heal—not only the physical wounds, but the emotional ones as well. I think [the documentary] was a cathartic process."

The film was produced by Free Spirit Media, a non-profit founded by Illinois native Jeff McCarter, winner of a Chicago/Midwest Emmy for his work in public television. Since its inception in 2000, Free Spirit—which promotes diversity in the staffing and content of media production—has helped produce more than 150 documentary shorts with students.

"Our students have produced quite a number of pieces related to violence, because it's ever present in their lives," McCarter says. "When we ask, 'Who knows someone who has been killed?'—every hand goes up."

Getting accepted at the Peace on Earth fest plays right into the non-profit's mission statement.

"A large and diverse audience is critical," McCarter says. "We want as many people as possible to see it, so [our students'] ideas can effect change." Retired actor Nick Angotti ("Die Hard 2") and host of CAN-TV's "Say Yes to Life," serves as executive director of the festival.

"I've always had this profound desire to create peace," Angotti says. "Films can reflect and feed on the fear of humanity. ... But if we bring together films that forward the possibility of change, I think we can begin planting the seeds for cultural change in humanity. And that's the whole concept."

The Peace on Earth Film Festival also will debut "[Dalai Lama](#) Renaissance," with director Khashar Darvish in attendance, as well as shorts by Jonathan Sale ("Sovereignty") and Joaquin Baldwin ("Papiroflexia").

For more information on "Will I Be Next?" and Free Spirit Media, visit freespiritmedia.org. "Will I Be Next?" also can be seen on [YouTube .com](http://YouTube.com).

The fest runs Friday-Sunday at Victory Garden's Biograph Theatre, 2433 N. Lincoln Ave. Tickets vary from \$12 to \$40 for a weekend pass. For more information, visit peaceonearthfilmfestival.org.