

Doc talk

November 9th, 2009

The [18th Hot Springs Documentary Film Festival](#) last month gave us an opportunity to check out a couple excellent documentaries. If you missed the showings at the festival, be on the lookout for the following titles:

If You Dare

Directed by Norah Shapiro, this film runs at less than an hour and explores the struggles of a theater program called the Chicago Avenue Project established to help inner city kids in Minneapolis. As the film shows, the program pairs an at-risk kid with an adult actor to teach them stage presence and an adult playwright who creates an original production for both to do together. In advanced programs, it's the kids who do the playwriting for adults.

At times heart wrenching, the film's interviews pull no punches as kids from the program talk about being the first in their family to have a shot at college or a Somali father talks about the hopes he has for his children. Sometimes they don't need to convey the emotion through words, as when one young woman walks away dejected knowing her mother, who promised to be at her performance, didn't show up — just as she's never shown up to any of them.

Integrating actual police footage, the film also shows just how gritty the neighborhood of the Pillsbury House Theater (host to the Project) can be when an alleged drug dealer is gunned down at a gas station just across the street. It reinforces the point that these are scenes kids in the program see every day.

Ultimately though, this is a film about the hope and the positive changes a little bit of caring can bring to the life of kids in tough situations, and it is a remarkable thing to see.