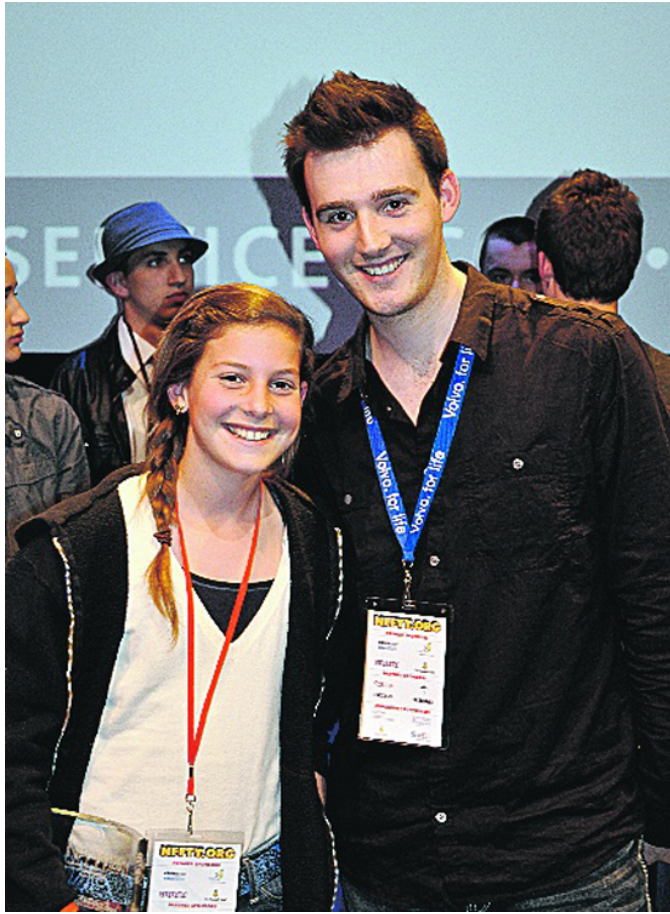


Published May 25th, 2011

## Lafayette's Award-Winning Young Filmmaker

Rebecca Eckland



Samantha Bell with Jesse Harris, Executive Director of the National Film Festival for Talented Youth  
Photo provided

Samantha Bell is a sixth-grade student at Stanley Middle School. Blonde and slender, she likes to play soccer and write stories. She also recently won the "Most Promising New Filmmaker Award" at the National Film Festival for Talented Youth which was held in Seattle on April 28-May 1. Her mom, Julie, said the event was remarkably crowded, "There were young people there from 30 states and 15 countries." The award-- just like the film-- was unexpected.

One and a half years ago, Bell was taken to the Children's Hospital in Oakland (CHOO) where a series of tests confirmed she had a staff infection. "She was feeling awful," Julie remembers, Bell says she only vaguely remembers Baykids approaching her about a film project.

Baykids is a nonprofit organization which teaches filmmaking to hospitalized children, leading them through the steps of film production to tell their stories. They asked Bell what she wanted to do a film about. "I didn't want to do a documentary; I didn't want to be on camera." So Bell focused on another aspect of her recovery: origami.

She knew how to fold birds and boxes; skills acquired from school and a workshop at the hospital. To cheer Bell up, friends brought her origami cranes. It's no wonder, then, that the characters that populate Bell's film are these "creatures" that kept her company.

Bell made the film from a table propped on her lap in the hospital bed. Described as "whimsical", the resulting project titled "Owl and Friends" is two minutes long.

Bell claims her film is "not a story." And yet, the origami figures which come to life speak to the theme of transformation. The owl-- a figure which opens and closes the film-- steps aside while paper objects dance and turn. An open box appears: the paper shapes fall inside and come out again as cranes.

"It took 500 frames to make the film," Julie recalls. Bell set the scene, took a photograph and then moved the figures slightly and took another frame, a film technique called "stop-motion." She was also involved in the editing process. "She had originally wanted the soundtrack to the film to be Fireflies by Owl City, but she couldn't have that song," says Julie. Baykids, then, wrote an original score for the short film which has a similar feel to the song Bell had wanted.

The first time Bell saw her film was at the in-hospital film screening (an opportunity for every Baykids filmmaker). "I thought it looked really cool," she says

Bell's film attracted the attention of a Pixar executive who happened to be present. He was impressed and told the Baykids board that this film would be a potential winner at film festivals. Weeks later, Bell learned she'd been accepted to NFFTY's festival in Seattle. Once there, she gave a speech in front of a very large audience.

Thanks to Baykids, Bell has more than one way to tell her stories.

Reach the reporter at: [info@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:info@lamorindaweekly.com)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA