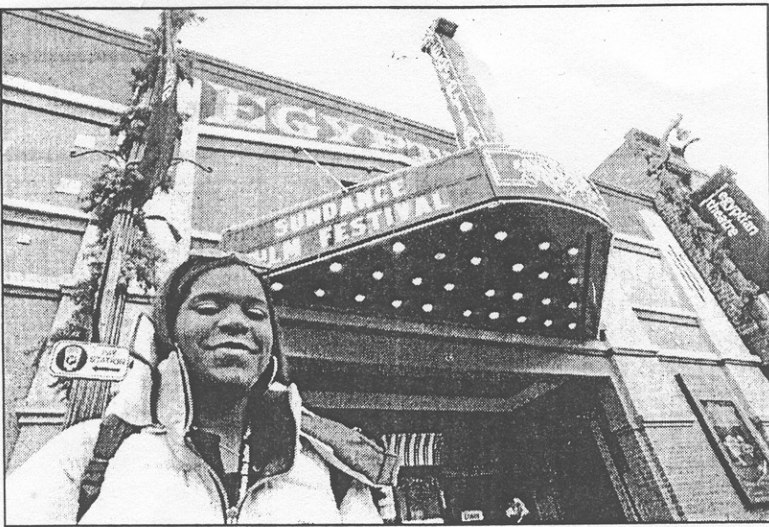


Arts & Entertainment



Independent / Clarence Sheppard

Southampton student Dayani Jackson outside the Egyptian Theatre on Main Street in Park City, Utah.

From Southampton To Sundance

By Pam DeRose

Fifteen-year-old Dayani Jackson produced and directed a public service announcement about dealing with diabetes that was shown at the Robert Redford-founded Sundance Film Festival last month. "She created quite a stir when her short film was screened by the judges," recalled Clarence Sheppard, head of the Black Media Foundation. Based on her performance in her short film, she was selected to participate in a Black Media Foundation and East End Unity video project called "I Live in the Hamptons."

Dayani was one of three students from the New York area to spend seven days in Park City, Utah at the Sundance Festival's Generation-Y Studio youth video program, where she presented her work along with other young filmmakers. "It was strange," Dayani

told The Independent about her experience there, "but in a good way."

At first, Dayani was a bit nervous about leaving the East End, but once she realized what a great opportunity Gen-Y was, she became very excited.

Over 60 students from across the nation attended Gen-Y Studio. They came from places like Seattle, New Orleans, Los Angeles, North Dakota, San Antonio, and Canada. The students watched movies during the morning, then met with the directors and/or producers in the afternoon to discuss the filmmaking process and the students' own films. Sheppard saw that meeting the directors and producers gave the students a chance to learn more behind-the-scenes information about the different types of film, producing, and what can be done to make the most of a film, depending on the

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producer and director's intents.

When Dayani first arrived in Park City, she did not really know what to expect from the trip. Soon after arrival, the students all took it upon themselves to get to know each other. Dayani found it very interesting to

meet everyone from all over. "You hear a lot of things about other cultures, but being there helped open my mind and learn the truth about other cultures," she said. Dayani and a few of her new friends are making long-distance plans to make a documentary of their time at Gen-Y.

Gen-Y also helped her to decide to pursue a career as a producer. "Working on those films made me feel about

everything else — it was wonderful!" she exclaimed.

"Many of the other students were older and more experienced filmmakers, and they all offered her much encouragement and told her not to hold herself back. Dayani's experience in Utah taught her to be open to trying new things and gave her more self-confidence as well as influenced her to begin working on future films. She intends to enter a film for the Sundance Festival again next year and is currently working on a few projects with some of her friends here in Southampton. "I'm thinking about doing a music video," she said. "I have some very musically talented friends."

The East End Unity video program is available to all students in Southampton, Bridgehampton, and East Hampton schools. It is a volunteer program designed to allow students to express themselves creatively and gain experience with film equipment. Led by William Hartwell it meets every Thursday at 6 p.m. in the Hampton Day School at 790 Butter Lane in Bridgehampton.

The Black Media Foundation is a nonprofit organization designed to educate students about the different forms of media and storytelling. It was begun by Clarence Sheppard and his wife, Natalie Byfield, in 1993. They were employed as a photographer and a journalist, respectively, for the New York Daily News when they slowly came to the realization that youngsters had

poor knowledge about the media world. So they decided to teach students to become media literate about newspapers, web pages, videos, and storytelling in general.

BMF is for ages 14 to 18. It relies on monetary and equipment donations. BMF often works with other groups to give students more opportunities to learn about their selected medium. In Dayani's case, BMF collaborated with East End Unity to provide students with the chance to go to the Sundance Festival and participate in the Gen-Y Studio.

Sheppard considers his foundation to be a great success when "quiet youths, like Dayani," come to the program and the experience opens them right up. "We want to keep that excitement going," Sheppard said, emphasizing the need to properly introduce students to the world of media.

For more information about BMF, call 281-2217 or log on at www.bmf.net.

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