

Columbians Present Work at Sundance Film Festival

Roma's Photography in Let the Church Say Amen and Carbin's Childhood Story Receive Acclaim at Famous Utah Festival

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Two Columbians, Associate Professor of Photography Thomas Roma and film student Jowan Carbin, School of the Arts '04, left the bustle of Manhattan for Park City, Utah this month to display their films at this year's Sundance Film Festival, a haven for the best in independent and experimental film-making.

Roma and Carbin are not only newcomers to Sundance, but rookies

in the field of film as a whole. *Welcome to Life*, Carbin's short about an only child of a single parent who feels like an outsider in his Washington elementary school, is Carbin's first film.

Carbin claims to have "stumbled" into his career as director and writer of the movie.

"I had a very active imagination as a child growing up," Carbin said, "and even wrote a play that was put on in my high school, but never quite thought of doing this."

Roma, an acclaimed photographer, collaborated on Sundance's *Let the Church Say Amen* with filmmaker David Petersen. Petersen found inspiration in Roma's book *Come Sunday*, which contains photographs of more than 50 churches. Roma advised Petersen to find a church not featured in *Come Sunday* and photograph that church's services for the film. The film uses these pictures to capture the life of the World Missions for Christ Church in Washington, D.C..

Roma began his career in photography after a severe car accident left him hospitalized, unable to do anything but "stare out the window." "I got my hands on a camera,"

Roma said, "so at least I could take pictures of what I saw out the window."

Complemented by his love of reading, Roma pursued his newfound hobby and made it into a career. Since then, he has received two Guggenheim Fellowships and published eight books of his photographs.

While Roma had previously worked in cinematography, acting, and photography, the experience of collaborating with Petersen was completely new.

"One of them [a member of the church speaking at Sundance] called [*Let the Church Say Amen*] 'our movie.' It choked me up," Roma said. "It was completely new to think of something as ours."

With such successful collaboration, Roma said he hopes to work with Petersen more in the future.

Carbin, who attended the University of Southern California's theater program, began his film career when he was advised by Alyson Renaldo, a close friend and associate producer of *Welcome to Life*, to attend the film division at the Columbia School of the Arts. "It was all so new to me, but

when I went to do exercises with a VHS recorder and saw my visions come to life, I knew this was exactly what I wanted to do," Carbin said.

The story was inspired partially by Carbin's childhood and partially by what he considers "universal themes of childhood." The film, which was also part of his final graduate portfolio, was not easy to make, as it was filmed in a Washington, D.C. school during the sniper attacks of 2002.

Since its release, Carbin's film

has received great acclaim. Outside of Sundance, it has garnered awards in the Palm Springs International Shorts Film Festival and the San Francisco Black Film Festival.

Carbin sees his success and his experience at Sundance as an impetus to create future films.

"I met a lot of the people who can help me make the leap from short to feature films," he said.

Carbin is currently promoting a feature-length film script.



[HTTP://FESTIVAL.SUNDANCE.ORG](http://festival.sundance.org)

Roma's photographs appear in *Let the Church Say Amen*.



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Jowan Carbin's film *Welcome to Life*—the story of an only child living in Washington—was shown at the Sundance Film Festival.