

## Student filmmaker wins big for orca film

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A Senior at NSU University School was recently recognized for her documentary film on Lolita, the orca of much controversy residing at Miami Seaquarium.

Jessica Roman and her co-cinematographer, Sydney Juda, were awarded "Best Documentary" at the 2016 All American High School Film Festival in New York for their work in "Lolita: The Bathtub Whale." The film additionally earned them spots as finalists in the categories of "Best Overall Film" and "Female Rising Star." Roman said the praise came as a shock, as she did not expect the documentary to outmatch the caliber of her competition.

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"I didn't get to see my screening or the screening of other documentaries, but when the award ceremony was happening and they were saying the nominees, they were sharing clips of everyone else's documentaries. I was like 'Ooh, I'm not going to get it,' because everyone's is amazing," said Roman. "I was just really, really intimidated."

The documentary explores the life of the killer whale, specifically the small tank she is kept in — an issue that has been protested by many activists. The 17-year-old filmmaker first learned about the other side to the glamour and pageantry of aquatic shows through a documentary titled "Blackfish." She then learned about Lolita through Twitter around the time her fate was being decided in terms of whether or not she would be released from the aquarium.

"I wanted to get more information because this whale has been there longer than my parents have been alive," Roman said. Roman added that her childhood dream was to study marine biology and become an aquatic trainer, a future that has been derailed by her discoveries. Lolita, originally named Tokitae, was transferred to the Miami Seaquarium in 1970 after a pod of killer whales were captured by herders.



Lolita was among several orca infants that day that were sold to various aquariums.

"I went there twice with my co-cinematographer and it was just crazy to see. You read so much about it but seeing it in person, I was crying a good part of the time. It was really, really terrible to see her like that," said Roman.

The film struck a chord at the film festival, as well as with her former Film and TV Production teacher at the school, Robert Adanto. Adanto, a documentary filmmaker himself, said there was no doubt in his mind the film would final and that he would have been shocked otherwise if it did not.

"When she told me she was doing this film, I knew she had the understanding of the issue and knew how to edit really well. She's got a great sense of when to move, when to cut because the audience has seen that footage for a while or when to go to some cool b-roll," Adanto said.

The young filmmaker said she sees film in her future as she prepares to head out to college, although becoming an environmental lawyer has become a new possibility with everything she has learned. But as long as she can, she plans on working on documentaries.

"If I have all this knowledge of film and the process and I know how to get it out there, then I should," Roman said.