I am from Northern Indiana, a booming metropolis of entertainment, I know. About as far away from the film and television industries as you can get. Instead of passing skyscrapers and movie sets on my way to school, I drove by horse and buggies (this is not hyperbole, there is literally an Amish community about 15 minutes away from my house). Most people think the Midwest is boring. I have heard it all my life. “Nothing ever happens here, there’s nothing to do,” and for a while I thought they might be right. I went to college thinking I might go to law school, or be a doctor, which was pretty much what everyone from my hometown did. I loved film and storytelling, but I never really thought about it as a potential career. Then, by chance, my junior year I took a documentary film class called Barn Stories. If I’m being honest, I didn’t even know what the class was, I just took it because the class I had been intending got cancelled. The goal of the class was to create a documentary about a building on campus (I’m not really sure why it was called Barn Stories), and my building was Notre Dame Stadium. I had seen about nine million videos about Notre Dame Stadium and how great it was, so instead, I decided to focus on the ushers of the stadium and in particular, an old man named Mack. Up until we interviewed Mack, our usher stories consisted of everything from meeting Bon Jovi to fans trying to sneak full sized salmon into the stadium, but Mack was different. When we asked him what his favorite memory of being an usher was, he told us about how just last year his wife had died. That week, some of the other ushers took him to the grotto, where students who had met Mack at games were waiting for him to help lift him up. I will never forget hearing that story and the reactions of other people hearing it for the first time at the film festival. Being able to help share someone’s story and having people enjoy my work was something I had never felt before and it was then I decided that I wanted to continue making documentaries.

Although I have made a few documentaries and short films before, I know I have much to learn. Northwestern is so intriguing to me not only because it offers me the ability to learn about the more technical aspects of filmmaking, such as camerawork, and lighting, but also because the ability to work closely with experienced film and documentary makers to help develop my own distinct style and understand the documentary making process. The chance to interact with filmmakers, not just professors who know about film, and that distinction is so important because as a young filmmaker, there is so much I don’t know about the filmmaking process that can only be learned from experience and people who have gone through it before. At Notre Dame, I was mostly surrounded by professors who studied films, but didn’t make them, so attending an institution with actual filmmakers is important to me. I am also attracted to how much freedom the program offers its students. In feature filmmaking, in order for someone to make their own films, they have to spend years networking and working their way up just to have a chance at being seen and given a chance at their own creation. This program offers its students to make their own projects right away and provides them with the tools and resources to do so. The city of Chicago also offers an incredibly diverse population with thousands of people with unique stories waiting to be told and is the perfect location to learn about documentary filmmaking.

The more I have delved into documentary filmmaking, the more excited I get. There are so many stories to tell, and I especially love being able to find fascinating people in places you would least expect them. Finding the uniqueness in life and sharing it with others is something I strive to do, and I believe studying and growing at Northwestern will help me to do so.