



Children & Animals

16mm | US | 11 min

Dir. Walker Kalan | Prod. Isabel Haro | Exec. Prod. Ser Nocturna



Logline

A 12-year old farmer brings his favorite goat to compete at a country fair in Maine, and experiences an existential awakening as he comes to terms with her inevitable death.





CHILDREN & ANIMALS is an ode to farm life – a celebration of its beauty and harshness, a document of a vital and often forgotten aspect of American culture, and a poetic exploration of mortality and time.

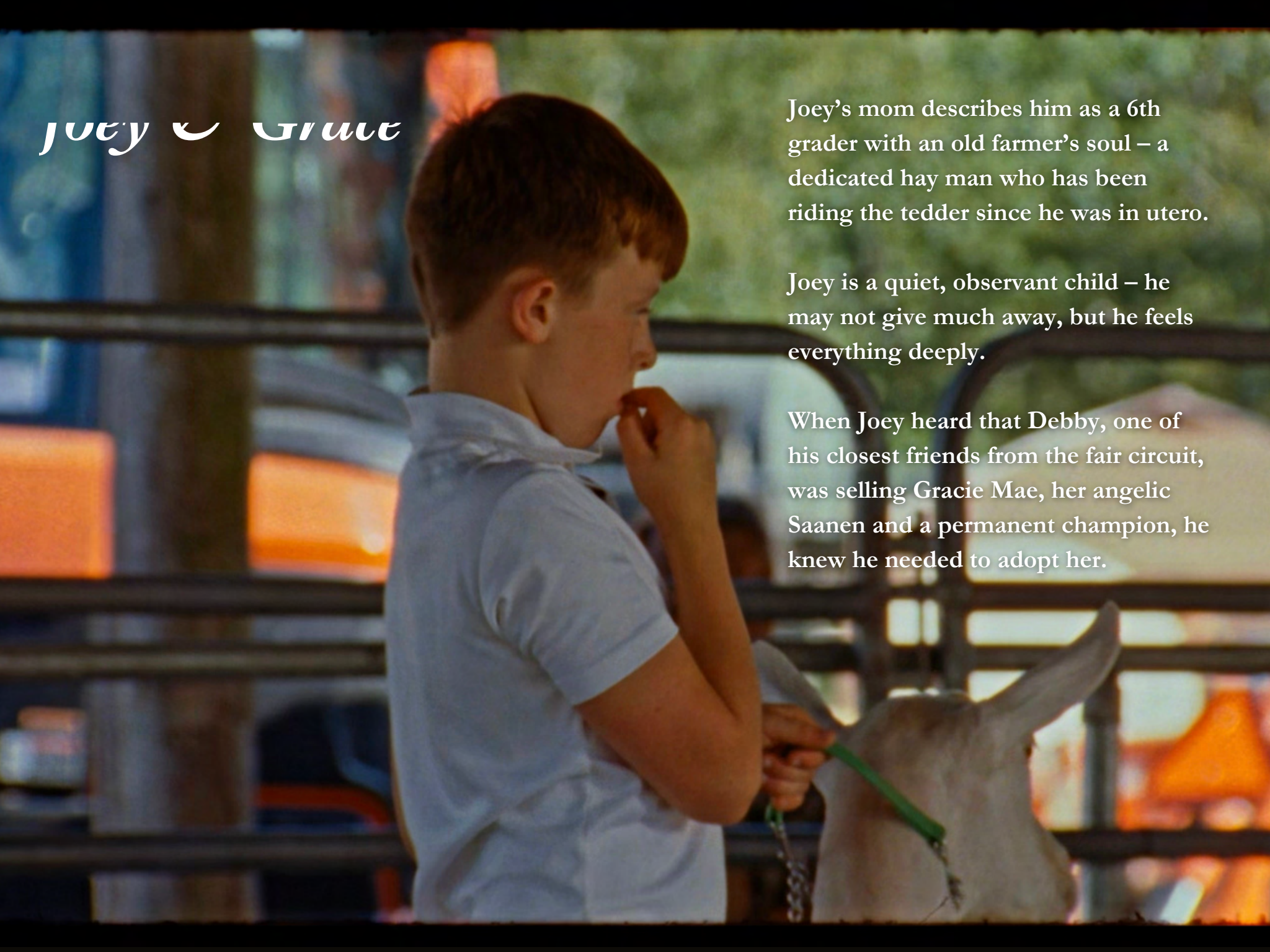


Synopsis

Twelve year old Joey's best friends are a 70 year-old farmer named Debby and a Saanen goat named Grace. On their way to the Blue Hill Fair to compete in a goat show, Debby tells Joey of the life and death of Spirit, her favorite goat, and something stirs within him: the life-changing, visceral realization that, one day, his beloved Grace will also die.

As Joey encounters inquisitive children, nostalgic elders, and the chaos of the carnival, his unease grows – all leading up to the goat show, where both he and Grace will be scrutinized by discerning judges and an eager audience, all while he contends with the existential weight of his newfound awareness around the inevitability of death.



A young boy with short brown hair, wearing a white polo shirt, is shown in profile, looking down at a goat head. He is holding a green rope attached to the goat's collar. The background is a blurred fair setting with wooden structures and warm, orange-toned lights.

JOEY & GRACIE

Joey's mom describes him as a 6th grader with an old farmer's soul – a dedicated hay man who has been riding the tedder since he was in utero.

Joey is a quiet, observant child – he may not give much away, but he feels everything deeply.

When Joey heard that Debby, one of his closest friends from the fair circuit, was selling Gracie Mae, her angelic Saanen and a permanent champion, he knew he needed to adopt her.



“You’re gonna have to ask your parents,” Debby responded. So, Joey asked his mom, who told him to ask his dad, and he asked his dad, who told him to ask his mom, and he went back to Debby and told her, “I think I can do this.”

Only 11 years old, Joey single-handedly raised \$300 through chores, show prizes, and birthday gifts, and bought Grace from Debby. Ever since, Grace has been his showmanship goat – his pride and joy and most loyal companion.

A large herd of white goats is running towards the camera, creating a sense of motion and energy. The goats are packed closely together, and their heads are in focus in the foreground, while the background is blurred. The overall tone is warm and golden, suggesting a late afternoon or early morning setting.

THE BLUE HILL FAIR

Since 1891, the Blue Hill Fair, one of the oldest county fairs in the United States, has been sustained by folks like Erik Fitch – who clocks up to 12 hours a day at the fairgrounds, seven days a week, all unpaid volunteer work. On top of his day job as county sheriff.

There's livestock Superintendent Becky Duhaime, who oversees the arrival, care, and departure of hundreds of livestock – this year, there were 200 goats alone.

The fair is an institution cherished and supported through generations. Becky inherited the post from her uncle, who served as livestock superintendent for 4 decades.

Phil Casette, a legendary goat farmer, has brought his goats to the competition for the past 51 years – the only year he missed was due to illness in his flock.





Mary Wells arrived at her first Blue Hill Fair on her mother's Ford Model T in 1936 and hasn't missed a single fair since. Four generations of Clements have shown their beef cattle here, alongside five generations of Averol family sheep.



Every year, over Labor Day Weekend, at least 50,000 people from all over Maine, the northeast, and the country will visit the fair. Local farmers from inland ride the ferris wheel with wealthy summering folks and families from neighboring Washington County, the nation's second poorest.

And when the fair ends, Sheriff Erik personally cleans the fairgrounds, picking up trash and forgotten items as the trailers and trucks drive away.



LOTTIE

While making farm visits across Maine in the months leading up to the Blue Hill Fair, we noticed a recurring motif in folks's accounts – that small farms are closing at an alarming rate, and youth participation in the 4-H agricultural program, once a bastion of rural life, is dwindling by the year.

Our choice to shoot on 16mm film came from the responsibility we felt to capture this fading way of life in a permanent and concrete manner – to create a lasting historic and physical record of it.



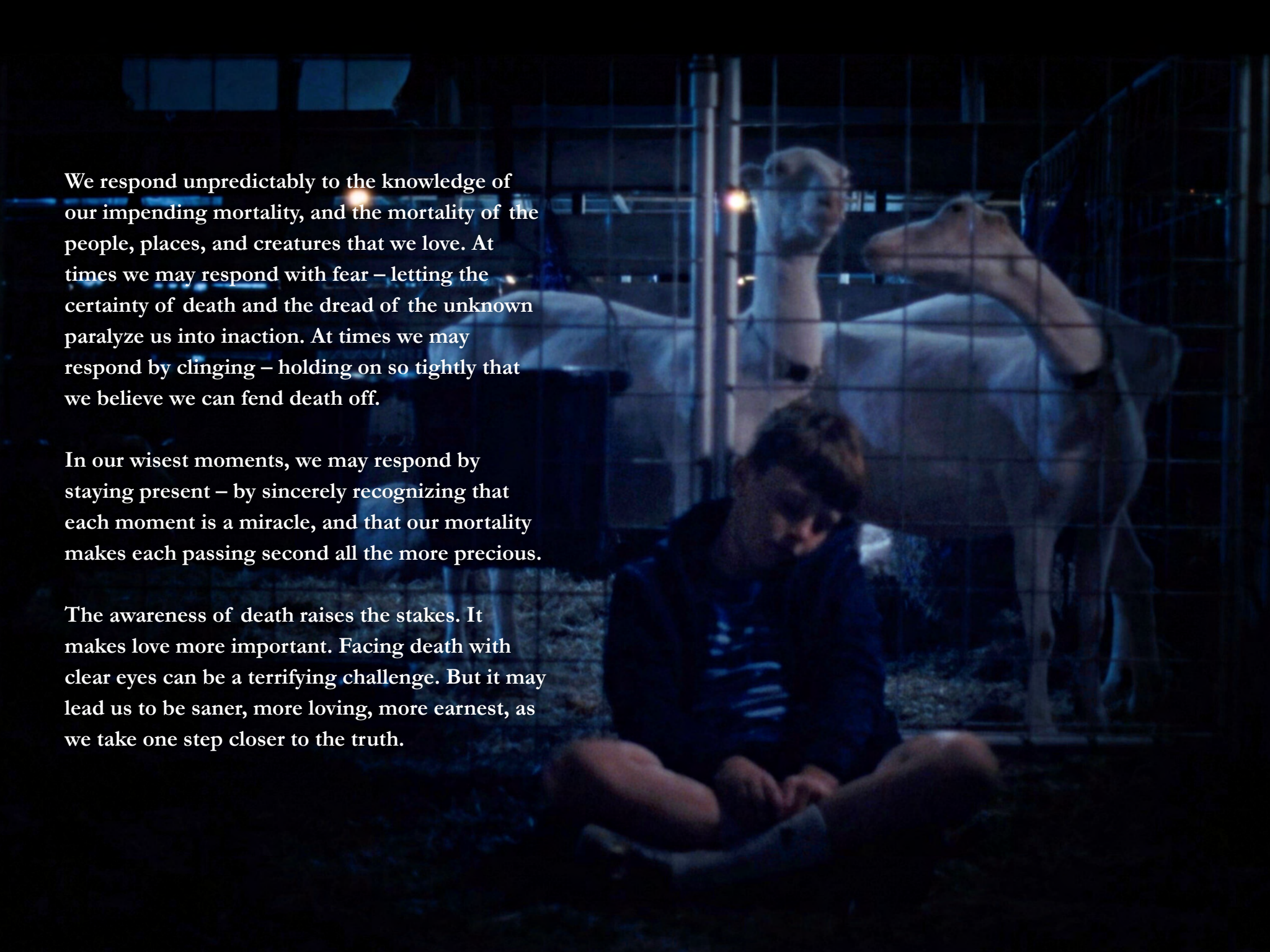
Artist Statement

“From one to two, Wilbur planned to sleep. From two to three, he planned to scratch itchy places by rubbing against the fence. From three to four, he planned to stand perfectly still and think of what it was like to be alive...”

Charlotte’s Web

In his 1948 essay *Death of a Pig*, E.B. White wrote about the illness and death of a pig in his farm, and his futile attempts at saving him. It’s speculated that White wrote *Charlotte’s Web* in response to this loss – an attempt at accomplishing his failed mission and saving his pig’s life.

In *Charlotte’s Web* Wilbur the pig survives, while Charlotte the spider dies, and Wilbur is left to contend with the grief of losing his best friend. Charlotte is survived by her daughters, granddaughters, and great-granddaughters, all of whom Wilbur witnesses grow, reproduce, and leave the barn – while he himself ages, as the days, months, and years go by.



We respond unpredictably to the knowledge of our impending mortality, and the mortality of the people, places, and creatures that we love. At times we may respond with fear – letting the certainty of death and the dread of the unknown paralyze us into inaction. At times we may respond by clinging – holding on so tightly that we believe we can fend death off.

In our wisest moments, we may respond by staying present – by sincerely recognizing that each moment is a miracle, and that our mortality makes each passing second all the more precious.

The awareness of death raises the stakes. It makes love more important. Facing death with clear eyes can be a terrifying challenge. But it may lead us to be saner, more loving, more earnest, as we take one step closer to the truth.

THE FILMMAKERS

Walker Kalan and Isabel Haro are husband and wife filmmakers based in Brooklyn, NY. Walker earned his MFA in playwriting from NYU Tisch, and Isabel is a graduate of the filmmaking program at Harvard. Their first project as a filmmaking duo, the indie comedy series *I NEED YOUR LOVE*, premiered at Tribeca in 2024 and received a grand jury award at Slamdance in 2025.



Walker grew up attending the Blue Hill Fair, cheering for his Mom at the annual cast iron skillet toss, and sneaking out past curfew to watch the demolition derby. It's been a dream of his to make a film at the Blue Hill Fair since he saw an Oberhasli goat named Shake & Bake take home the best in show ribbon at the 2001 fair.

