

Collision (2007) - By Jordan Garren

## collision



*In the city, timing is everything.*

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<http://www.roguecinema.com/article-974--0-0.html>

Several weeks ago, after agreeing to review her film, writer / producer / director / co-editor, Sharyn Chen sent me a copy of "Collision" inside a bright orange Trapper portfolio complete with a well put-together press kit. Though I figured the folder was used for economic reasons (it probably only cost a buck, if that), after watching the film, I found that it had a much more significant meaning, which I'll get into a bit later. "Collision" was the thesis film that Sharyn made while attending City College in New York (where she recently received her Master of Fine Arts degree! Congrats Sharyn!) and it is one of the best short films I've ever had the pleasure of watching. The story revolves around three main characters: Malia (played by the gorgeous Tracy Perez), a 15-year-old runaway who is now fending for herself on the mean streets of New York City, **Zeke (Franklin Ojeda-Smith) a homeless recovering alcoholic street vendor**, and lastly Elias (Tom Monahan), an autistic man with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder.

When we first meet Malia, she's having an argument with her boyfriend Marcus who believes that she's been sleeping with a friend of his. The result? Malia and her belongings end up on the street. As she gathers her things off the sidewalk, Elias happens by and becomes

enamored with Malia's orange folder and.... aha! The significance of the orange folder that "Collision's" press kit came in is revealed! Malia lets Elias keep the folder and storms off, leading to a day full of hardships in which she'll have to lie and steal to survive. Momentarily, *Zeke becomes part of this tale while peddling some old lamps and other knickknacks on the street. Zeke is a recovering alcoholic and has plans to visit his daughter once he's saved up enough cash. He keeps all of his earnings in an empty bottle of Jack Daniels (which acts as a sort of talisman against his former drinking problem) and seems to be a very intelligent gent that has turned to religion and faith in order to help fight his cravings for alcohol.* In the meantime, Elias wanders aimlessly around the Big Apple, picking through trashcans, grabbing garbage off the sidewalks, and doing his hourly OCD ritual at 1:01, 2:02, 3:03, 4:04...

The film finally comes to a head when Malia's attempt to leave a Mexican restaurant without paying is thwarted. While she tries her damnest to escape, *Zeke in the meantime calls his daughter Theresa on a nearby payphone. Things seem fine until Zeke mentions that he'd like to come for a visit and see the new baby. Apparently Zeke was an angry drunk back in the day and did (and most likely said) some pretty hurtful things, because Theresa coldly turns him away. After she hangs up on him, Zeke decides that he's remained sober for long enough and decides that now is as good a time as any to nurse his emotional wounds with alcohol. During Zeke's quest for liquor he literally has a run in with Malia and ends up saving her a trip to the police station. (Zeke pays Malia's outstanding bill from the eatery she snuck out of.) Before parting ways, Zeke imparts a bit of his wisdom onto her which young Malia shrugs off because "she's not homeless." Zeke's part in this story ends here leaving us viewers to decide what his fate may have been, (Did he hit the booze again? I guess we'll never know.) but in Elias' case, no guessing is necessary.*

*At the precise moment that Zeke and Malia went their separate ways, the time was 11:11, which means that*

*Elias is doing his OCD ritual. As Elias does his thing, two kids stroll by and end up knocking Elias' cart full of junk to the ground. Poor Elias frets for a moment and begins collecting his things, only to end up on the wrong end of a speeding car. As the film comes to a sad conclusion, Malia coincidentally arrives on the scene of the accident and discovers her orange folder. As she opens it up and inspects it, tears begin falling from her eyes. While I assumed at first that she was crying because she realized who had died in the accident, I've since replayed it in my mind and think that she's crying because she's been faced with her own mortality.*

Instead of Elias, it could very well have been her getting hit by that car. And perhaps she's now realized that she's too young to be wandering the streets of New York alone, and wishes she could be safely back at home with her mother.

"Collision" is an excellent short film and I was very impressed at how professionally shot and edited it was. Some indie film makers stumble a bit when they make their first film, but Sharyn Chen is amazingly surefooted in her film making debut. The story is fairly interesting and I personally felt that it could have been fleshed out a bit more, as I would have liked to know what happens to Zeke and Malia. After the movie ended, I sat there and wondered if Zeke had actually returned to his old ways or if he managed to overcome his grief and toss his urge to drink aside. And I would've loved to see if Malia went back home or not, or attempted to continue her struggle to survive on the streets. While I'm more than content with the final product, I definitely would've welcomed another half hour of footage, because dang it, I need closure! The acting in "Collision" is very good and the three main actors all do a wonderful job in bringing their troubled characters to life.

Tracy Perez is great as the tough-talking Malia and really gives her role as a teenage runaway some depth. Malia may act tough, but she's really just a scared little girl, desperately trying to find shelter, food, and companionship in order to survive. There's one scene in the film where Malia is basically raped by a

guy she randomly meets near a public basketball court. At first she's tough-talking Malia and ends up making out with the guy, but once he reveals that he wants to have sex with her, Malia makes a rather meek attempt to leave the guy stranded with a hard-on. You can tell that she doesn't want to have sex with him and would rather be somewhere else, but instead of walking away she just stands there, looks away, and allows the young man to have his way with her. Needless to say, she definitely did not enjoy herself. This scene struck me as sort of odd, but I guess it's there to show that Malia is either desperate for some companionship, or was just too afraid to say no.

***Franklin Ojeda-Smith (who I had recently seen in Disney's "Invincible" which explains why he looked so familiar) is a fantastic actor, and his character Zeke is a rather tragic figure. Zeke seems like a happy-go-lucky guy with a lot going for him even though he's homeless, but he goes through an almost instantaneous change after talking with his daughter on the phone. After she opens up some old wounds and tells him to stay away, Zeke seeks solace in the one thing he's been avoiding for years: alcohol.*** Finally there's Tom Monahan who was simply excellent as Elias. Tom gives Elias a sort of "Rain Man" spin, though in this case, the autistic character isn't a math wiz and probably doesn't know how to count cards. Though Elias is the only character in the film to die, I really believe that he enjoyed life much more than Malia or Zeke. I say this because Elias wanders around in blissful ignorance and only has two things to worry about: his cart full of junk and his odd hourly ritual. He doesn't worry about broken relationships with family members and also doesn't seem to worry much about where he's going to get his next meal. He just meanders aimlessly through New York with not a care in the world.

As you can see, the film packs quite a bit into its short running time and really lives up to its title. Though there literally is a collision at the end of the film (offscreen) that ultimately kills Elias, the title symbolically refers to how the three main characters in the film "collided" and affected each other's lives for

better or for worse. "Collision" is definitely a huge step in the right direction for Sharyn Chen, and I really hope to see her crank out more films of this caliber in the future. (I wonder how she'd handle a horror film... hmm...) Currently, Sharyn's film is available to purchase on DVD at the official "Collision" website. The disc offers a very clean and crisp 1:1.66 widescreen transfer with good, clear audio, and comes with a gallery of production stills as an extra feature. For further information about the film or to contact the director, please visit [www.collisionthefilm.com](http://www.collisionthefilm.com)!