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'Film therapy'

*Good medicine
for sick kids*



By DEBRA BANERJEE

The subjects of Angelight films are adorable, funny, wise-beyond-their-years children. They also happen to be chronically or terminally ill with brain or spinal cord tumors.

Edgemont native Stephanie Angel, 29, turned her expertise in filmmaking and her own family's experience with a childhood illness into a labor of love with Angelight Films. The nonprofit production company allows sick kids to express themselves in their own short films.

Stephanie is the daughter of Dennis and Linda Angel of Edgemont, and sister of Michelle and Rebecca. Her sister Ilana was 5 when she succumbed to a secondary infection after surgery for a brain tumor in 1989. The Angel family founded the Children's Brain Tumor Foundation in 1988.

"My sister was a bright spirit," said Angel, who was 7 when Ilana died. Angel hopes to capture that same bright spirit in children who are often defined by their illness.

"I want to share who they are," Angel said. "They are so bright and aware. I don't know if it's what they've been through. There is sometimes so much focus on the negative. I'm bringing out who they are."

Angel hopes the films will have a lasting impact on society by showing that these unique individuals could be tomorrow's leaders with more medical research to cure their disease.

"We have so much to learn from these bright children who have been through so much," Angel said on her website www.angelight-films.org.

Angelight Films, a 501(c)3 company formed in 2009, depends on donations to finance the films. Angelight's first fundraiser will be held Monday, Dec. 13, from 6:30-9 p.m. at the Anthology Film Archives, 32 Second Ave., in New York City. At the event the first three short films, starring Lilly, Kyle and Colin, will be shown, and there will be silent and live auctions. Many items were donated by Scarsdale merchants to be included in a "Scarsdale Splurge" package. Wine, beer and hors d'oeuvres will be served.

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Filmmaker
Stephanie Angel
with Colin, the
star of his own
film.



Lilly expressed herself through a music video.

Angelight Films to hold first fundraiser

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Angel's long-term goal is to create a TV channel in hospitals so other children can see the films. She also would like to expand the filmmaking to include children with other illnesses. She hopes the fundraiser will create awareness for Angelight Films and will bring corporations or film media companies on board.

Angel, who lives in Jersey City and has an office on Morton Street in Manhattan, graduated from Edgemont High School in 1999. She earned a bachelor's degree in 2003 from Muhlenberg College in a self-designed major, "film expression" and "spiritual thought." In the years since then, she's worked on many feature films, TV programs and commercials as a script supervisor. The script supervisor, she explained, is the detail-oriented member of the film crew who assures the continuity of the film, keeps track of script changes and acts as a liaison between the director and the editor. When she was a senior in college, Angel was a script supervisor trainee on the film "The Bridge of San Luis Rey"

starring Robert DeNiro, Kathy Bates, Harvey Keitel and F. Murray Abraham and shot in Spain.

She's also written a screenplay and has experience as a writer, director and producer. "I always liked writing, and I always wanted to be a director," she said. She wrote and directed the film "Tree of Life" which premiered in 2005 at the Westchester Film Festival.

For Angelight Films, Angel is involved in every aspect of the process. A social worker from the Children's Brain Tumor Foundation recommends a child. Angel meets with the parents and the child and has the child do a sketch book "to get the creativity going," then brainstorm the child's ideas. The kids have a choice of creating a music video, a documentary or a narrative story. A story meeting takes place to discuss the type of film, music and locations. Angel writes the script from the child's story. Her director of photography shoots and edits the under-10-minute film. After the film is edited, the family has a screening and gets a DVD copy of

the film.

"The families are about living in the moment," Angel told the Inquirer. "They are so happy to have the film. They are very appreciative. It's a therapy for the kids too, a huge release."

For Kyle, a little boy from Connecticut, the film was a way to express his love for family and friends and a way to share his story in hopes of fostering more awareness and research on his rare brain tumor that was found to contain Lyme disease.

Although the children in the films have brain tumors, they don't necessarily "look sick," and the films, while touching, are not sad, but uplifting and life-affirming.

Angel finds the process from start to finish a "rewarding, heartfelt, joyful experience."

Tickets to the Angelight Films Fundraiser at Anthology Film Archives, 32 Second Ave., Manhattan, on Dec. 13 are \$40, \$50 at the door. Children under 12 are admitted free. For information, call (212) 463-0029 Ext. 150 or see www.angelightfilms.org.