



Lyla Thomas stands next to Paul, one of her Tulsa State Fair “guests.”

SHARING HOPE AND JOY

Tulsa fourth grader’s work with homeless earns her trip to ‘The Kelly Clarkson Show’

JIMMIE TRAMEL
Tulsa World

Lyla Thomas, 10, likes tacos, pizza, Marvel movies and the Tulsa State Fair.

That seems on brand for a fourth grader.

Here’s how Lyla’s story veers into different territory: She jumped aboard Tulsa State Fair rides, and they took her all the way to “The Kelly Clarkson Show.”

Magic? Only in the sense that she was rewarded for caring about others.

Each of the past two years, Lyla embarked on missions to pay for homeless individuals to enjoy the Tulsa State Fair.

One of Lyla’s fair excursions became a segment on local TV news. The segment was shared with other stations, and, according to Lyla’s family, someone at “The Kelly Clarkson Show” saw it by way of an East Coast station. That led to an invitation to appear on the show.

Lyla accepted and flew to New York with her mother, Sam Powell, for a Wednesday, May 14 taping. The episode is expected to air Monday, May 19.

Lyla felt simultaneously “re-

ally good and kind of nervous” about the opportunity to be on the show. There she was, fielding questions from Clarkson, all because of questions that popped into her brain two years ago.

A desire to help others experience joy

In January 2023, Lyla attended a Martin Luther King Jr. Day parade on the OSU-Tulsa campus. She noticed people who were experiencing the difficulties of homelessness. In an interview prior to the New York trip, she recalled watching a homeless person being helped by police officers.

Kids tend to be curious and ask questions, but Lyla’s mom said she was in no way, shape or form prepared for one of the questions Lyla asked about the homeless that day.

Said Powell: “First it was ‘Why aren’t they going to the parade?’ And I think I said, ‘Well, they may not feel comfortable. They may not want to leave their things. They may feel self-conscious. Who knows?’”

Powell said Lyla’s next question “took my breath away a lit-



COURTESY PHOTOS, SAM POWELL

Lyla Thomas was photographed by her mother during a trip to New York City to appear on “The Kelly Clarkson Show.”



Lyla Thomas, second from left, joins two FairShare guests and a City Lights worker on a ride at the Tulsa State Fair.

tle bit.”

The question: Do they experience joy like us?

“I was like, OK, let me figure out how to answer that,” Powell recalled.

“My mom said ‘Yes, but maybe not in a kind of way that we do,’” Lyla said. “I wanted them to experience how we had joy. And so one of the places I experience lots and lots and lots of joy is at the Tulsa State Fair.”

Powell said Lyla’s idea went from zero to 100 pretty quickly. With help from adults, Lyla be-

came the founder of FairShare (fairshareok.com), a program with a mission to provide un-housed friends in Tulsa with an opportunity to experience joy in its purest form.

In 2023, Lyla put boots on the ground (primarily at sporting events) to raise \$1,500 and send seven guests and their caseworkers to the fair. In 2024, she raised \$5,000 and gifted a trip to the fair to twice as many guests.

The fair tradition will continue in 2025 — and Lyla has something bigger in mind to assist the

homeless.

Lyla is trying to generate \$75,000 to build a FairShare House in cooperation with the City Lights Foundation, a non-profit organization that strives to those experiencing homelessness through relational service and dignified housing.

According to Powell, the mini home Lyla wants to build will come with a placard that acknowledges her, “and my understanding is she’ll get to pick the paint colors and the landscaping and all of that. And then it will go to a deserving individual who has done all the work to get off the streets. Rent is affordable, and laundry is in the community space with all the resources, so it’s a really beautiful concept.”

Forgetting about being ‘an outsider’

Staffers at the City Lights Foundation recommend the guests Lyla accompanies to the fair. Each guest receives a haircut, new shoes, new clothes and a hotel stay the night before the fair trip so they can shower and be rested before their day of fun.

What does Lyla enjoy about the fair? “The rides and the food and the animals,” she said. “All of it.”

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Tim Blake Nelson talks about his set-in-Oklahoma film

Production has begun in Georgia for ‘The Life and Deaths of Wilson Shedd’

JIMMIE TRAMEL
Tulsa World

Tulsa’s Tim Blake Nelson is writing and directing a set-in-Oklahoma film that stars Amanda Seyfried, who earned an Academy Award nomination for her work in “Mank,” and Scoot McNairy, who played Woody Guthrie in “A Complete Unknown.”

The film is titled “The Life and Deaths of Wilson Shedd.” A description for the film said this: A teacher in an abusive marriage takes a job at a maximum-security prison where she falls for a charismatic inmate. The disastrous consequences call into question not only the



Nelson

has started in Columbus, Georgia.

“Ultimately, it’s a story about what we do to one another,” Nelson told the Tulsa World. “And while it addresses certain polemical issues in terms of the morality surrounding incarceration, punishment and rehabilitation and retribution, it really isn’t a polemical movie. It’s more a delving into our tragic humanness that spans from the generosity of love and

nature of punishment and retribution, but the very limits of our humanity.

“The Life and Deaths of Wilson Shedd” is set mostly in Pittsburg County and west of Pittsburg County, according to Nelson. Production

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Dierks Bentley returning for BOK Center tour stop

Musician was a surprise guest at epic Boys From Oklahoma concert in Stillwater

JIMMIE TRAMEL
Tulsa World

Dierks Bentley had a great view for what he called “my favorite concert I’ve ever watched.”

The concert? The opening night of The Boys From Oklahoma concert series in Stillwater.

“Ragweed. Boone Pickens Stadium. Numero uno,” Bentley said. “I’ve seen some good ones. I’ve been a part of some good ones. But that was the best.”

Cross Canadian Ragweed reunited to co-headline four nights — April 10 through April 13 — at Boone Pickens



Bentley

weed on stage for one song.

Author and Red Dirt music authority Josh Crutchmer described the team-up in his just-released book, “Never Say Never.”

“Dierks Bentley joined to sing his favorite Ragweed song, ‘42 Miles,’ and needed a second chance to pick up a musical cue because he was busy

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Thomas

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Lyla’s fair guests are free to enjoy any or all of the above.

Lyla shared this memory from one of the fair trips: “One person was like, ‘Wow, this is amazing. I’m so blessed that I get a hot meal every day, but I don’t really get to choose what I eat, but today it’s different. I get to choose what I want to eat.’”

Were the fair trips emotional for guests? Said Lyla: “I think maybe one or two got a little emotional, but overall they were just really happy and just constantly giving me hugs and wanting me to go on rides or get food.”

Powell posted on Facebook about the 2024 fair trip, indicating bumper cars and carnival games were a huge hit and bellies were full and happy. Said the post: “Our guests ranged from 2 years old to 63 years old. Paul, our oldest guest this year, had never been to the fair in his life. He kept sharing over and over how touched he was that, of all people, a child would think of him and make sure he has the opportunity to experience something like this. He used a big portion of his budget to win Lyla a stuffed animal.”

Lyla’s father, Trent Thomas, joined Lyla on the fair trips with the homeless. He said guests were happy to not feel like an outsider.

“They felt like, hey, we’re all here with everyone else enjoying the bright lights and the cool rides and the unique smells and foods and tastes that come with the fair,” Thomas said. “Whenever I spoke with them, that seemed to be the No. 1 thing is just they feel ostracized. ... But not that day, not whenever they’re just at the fair, just being able to forget about their situation, if only for a few hours.”

‘I’m proud’ doesn’t do it justice

Thomas used the words “fascinating” and “wonderful” when asked about everything that has happened as a result of Lyla’s desire to bring joy to the homeless. He said it has all gotten bigger than he ever hoped. All he initially hoped was she would learn that if you have an idea, you can see it through and make it happen.

Lyla’s parents learned alongside her as her goal become reality. Thomas said they are fortunate Lyla’s mom is in public relations so she could help make things happen.

Said Powell: “Being in the industry that I’m in, I luckily had a



Lyla Thomas was accompanied by her mother, Sam Powell, on a trip to New York for a taping of “The Kelly Clarkson Show.”



Lyla Thomas of Tulsa stands in the doorway of a room where she waited until it was her turn to take part in a taping of “The Kelly Clarkson Show.”

If you want to help

To contribute to Lyla Thomas’ FairShare House project in co-operation with the City Lights Foundation, go to citylightsok.org/fairshare.

lot of contacts where it just took a phone call and saying, ‘Hey, this is what my kid wants to do. What are your thoughts?’ And they’re like, ‘Well, let’s partner.’ I think I’m incredibly blessed that it just took a few phone calls for people to be like, well, let’s support her. I don’t want to discredit Lyla, because she did everything that she could to raise every dollar possible and showed up and did all the hard work. It was just a matter of finding someone to partner with, and once that was done, then it was kind of the sky’s the limit.”

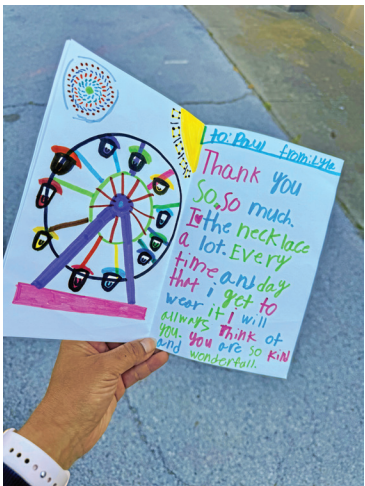
Thomas was pitched this question: What does this whole thing tell you about your daughter?

“Well, it tells me something that I’ve already known, but maybe not everyone else does,” he said. “It’s just that she’s a very curious girl. She’s not afraid to



COURTESY PHOTOS, SAM POWELL

Lyla Thomas loves everything about the Tulsa State Fair – the rides, the food, the animals – and found a way to share the enjoyment with people who are less fortunate.



Lyla Thomas created a thank you card for a FairShare guest, Paul, who gifted her a necklace.

ask hard questions, and her mom and I are not afraid to answer difficult or challenging questions. And just because something is challenging or difficult does not mean it’s not worth tackling.”

Lyla shared that she has more ideas she would like to pursue in the coming years, so her dad is excited to see what those might be.

Said Lyla’s mom: “She still ren-



FairShare guests and City Lights workers take a group picture before enjoying the Tulsa State Fair with Lyla Thomas (middle, wearing a FairShare shirt) in 2024.

ders me speechless on the daily, and ‘I’m proud’ doesn’t do it justice. But I’m here to support her however I can, and obviously this is a very easy thing to support. I’m just over here standing on the side, beaming and doing what I can to help.”

Lyla was asked to identify the

best thing that has happened to her as a result of her work with the homeless. She said this: “Either experiencing and watching them having joy or going to New York and being on ‘The Kelly Clarkson Show.’ I can’t choose.”

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Nelson

From D1

trust to the baser instincts we have toward self-preservation at any cost and vengeance.”

Asked about the inspiration for the story, Nelson said there were three influences – two taken from real life and another from Southern literature writ large.

“Like all the scripts I write, I started out and focused on one of those real-life events and let the characters and their challenges lead me where they would,” Nelson said. “And I just found, as a writer, that the friction that occurs between characters strongly motivated to get what they want is what builds story, and that’s true in life, as well as fictional narrative.”

Nelson said Seyfried is playing a role she never played before, which will only add to her “astounding” career. He handed her the script while they were on the set of “Ann Lee,” an upcoming historical drama.

“I know when ‘Ann Lee’ comes out later in the year, which is a film that Mona Fastvold and Brady Corbet have made, in which I got to act opposite Amanda last summer, she’s pretty much now going to join the pantheon of that top five or six American actresses,” Nelson said, mentioning the names of others.

“Amanda deserves to be there, and, with ‘Ann Lee,’ that’s going to happen because people are going to see once again what she’s capable of. And we’re really lucky that she chose to have this movie be her next drama after that.”

The film will have a Tulsa component because a minister from north Tulsa (played by actress Devyn Tyler) will get involved with the main storyline. Nelson called her a wonderful actress.



COURTESY, RED BARN FILMS

Tim Blake Nelson, center, is shown with prop supervisor Keith Walters on the set of “The Life and Deaths of Wilson Shedd.”

“What’s great about doing indie films with financiers sensitive to the story, and the way it is told coming first, is that sometimes you can cast the most suitable actress or actor rather than having to put a star in a role,” he said. “And this is a case where we have really been able to do that.”

Nelson said the film is being

shot in Columbus, Georgia, because the town invested in the movie.

“They put up equity for the movie in exchange for us shooting here,” he said. “And they also allowed us full access to Muscogee County Jail ... and also a state prison work camp that’s about 20 minutes to the north.

But I also have to express my incredible gratitude for the film commission in Oklahoma and McAlester prison itself for allowing my production designer and me a comprehensive visit to the prison.”

Nelson said he really wants to come back and shoot a movie in his home state.

“But in this case, we had a town that added to the allure of the Georgia tax break – a considerable financial investment stake in the movie – and just putting the movie first, ahead of my allegiance to the state of Oklahoma, it’s a deal I had to take.”

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