

Opposing worlds united on screen

NARROWING GAP: Filmmaker with roots in Eastern Cape takes stand for disabled in latest production, set in New York City, PE township

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NEW Brighton may be half a world away from New York, but award-winning Port Elizabeth filmmaker and disability activist Shelley Barry is narrowing the gap between the Nelson Mandela Bay township and the US city in her latest film.

Barry's fictional film tells the tale of two young girls with disabilities – wheelchair-user Anjelica, who lives in the Bronx, New York, and visually impaired Nomathamsanqua, in New Brighton. While they never meet, their lives follow a similar path, as both have a vision they go in search of, accompanied by their best friends.

Barry, now involved in pre-production for the film in New York City, will be in Port Elizabeth from next week for the local auditions for *New York/New Brighton* next Saturday.

"The film came to me in dreams and I am quite convinced it is directly from the ancestors. I started writing the dreams down and the story developed very naturally from that," said Barry, 36, who was shot and paralysed in a taxi violence incident in Cape Town in 1996.

"It's the simple tale of a young girl with a visual impairment, who dreams of meeting Nelson



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SHELLEY BARRY
FILMMAKER AND DISABILITY ACTIVIST

Mandela. Across the sea, another girl, Anjelica, dreams of meeting a spiritual figure, believed to live in the sea.

"The reason I'm using characters with disabilities is because I believe people with disabilities should be visible on screen. As a disability activist, I am using film as my form of revolution."

The film is also being made to honour former president Nelson Mandela, said Barry, who completed her Master of Fine Arts in film in the US last year.

"He is special because of what he has done for this country. But ... I also believe there is something almost magical about him. When I had the chance to meet him, I was distinctly aware of bright light emanating from him – it's hard to describe."

For those auditioning for roles, no previous acting experience is necessary, said Barry, who directs Port Elizabeth-based production company, twospinning-wheels productions. "I think there are very few people in our country who have the opportuni-



STREETS OF NEW YORK: Port Elizabeth filmmaker and disability activist Shelley Barry takes in the sights of Times Square in New York City.

ty to go to acting classes or to study acting, so I would not want that to be my criteria. If you have talent, you have it."

The film will be the first Barry

makes during her artist residency from July to December at the University of the Witwatersrand's film department. The film will be made in the Eastern

Cape, with shooting starting next month. "I am devoted to the Eastern Cape. It will always be home, and where I will place my energies as a filmmaker."

Barry is hoping funding for the film, for which she has applied, will come through before shooting starts. "If I have to make this film on a credit card and pay it off for the rest of my life, I will. It just has to be made."

The work-in-progress version of her thesis film, *Where we planted Trees* – about forced removals in Fairview, Port Elizabeth – was named best documentary at the Diamond Screen Film Festival in Philadelphia last year. This documentary about her roots, with her family members in the leading roles, is due for release worldwide in January.

During her student years, Barry won eight awards for *Whole – A Trinity of Being*, which told her own story of being shot.

The trailer for *New York/New Brighton* can be viewed on her website, www.shelleybarry.com.

□ Auditions will take place next Saturday from noon to 5pm at the PE Opera House. Aspiring actors between the ages of 11 and 55, who can speak Xhosa and English, are invited.



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