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ILLUMINATE Film Festival Celebrates Dalai Lama's 90th Birthday with Release of 9 Award-Winning Micro-Short Films

Each 90-second film, chosen from nearly 700 global submissions, honors the message: "We are all the same."

Santa Barbara, CA — In celebration of **His Holiness the Dalai Lama's 90th birthday on July 6**, ILLUMINATE Film Festival has released **nine powerful micro-short films**, each exactly **90 seconds long** — a symbolic tribute offering **one second for every year** of his life devoted to compassion, service, and spiritual leadership.

The nine winning films were selected from nearly **700 submissions** to ILLUMINATE's **\$25,000 Micro-Short Film Contest**, inspired by the Dalai Lama's message that "*we are all the same*." Each film explores themes of **love, kindness, unity, and the shared human experience**, and together they form a deeply moving mosaic of short-form storytelling.

"We're honoring not just a milestone birthday, but a global legacy of compassion in action," said Téana David, ILLUMINATE's Artistic Director. "These films, inspired by the Dalai Lama, are 90-second meditations on what it means to be human — what it means to love, to connect, and to recognize ourselves in each other."

In numerology, the number **9** represents spiritual wisdom, humanitarianism, and the culmination of a cycle — qualities embodied by His Holiness and echoed in each winning film.

1st Prize – *My World* by Jorrit Van Der Kooi

2nd Prize – *Eugenia* by Anthony Notarile

3rd Prize – *Oneness* by Barbara Doux

People's Choice Award: *Garden of Peace* by Tess Cacciatore & Team Yumi

Honorable Mentions:

- *Be Better* – Kathryn Jurbala, Will Hoppin, & Keldon Duane-McGlashan
- *Go Time* – Ari Kuschnir & Schuyler Brown
- *Just For A Moment* – Diana Hickman
- *Noteworthy* – Joe Rizzo
- *The Way of Unity* – Tatiana Speed, Mark Benson & Bob Atkinson

The esteemed jury for the contest—youth leader, Xiye Bastida, author Chaz Ebert, and filmmaker Louie Schwartzberg—brought a wealth of vision and expertise to the selection process. Their thoughtful curation elevated the festival's celebration of global micro-filmmaking and inspired participants from around the world.

The films were first screened at the **2025 ILLUMINATE Film Festival** in Santa Barbara and later shared virtually during the global online edition of the festival. As of today, they are being released to the public as a global birthday offering and an invitation to pause, reflect, and reconnect with our shared humanity.

“This isn’t just a festival — it’s a global movement,” said Kia Kiso, Interim Executive Director. “At its best, entertainment and media remind us who we truly are and encourage us to be the best version of ourselves. ILLUMINATE is committed to growing a conscious media ecosystem that heals, connects, and inspires.”

Watch the full collection at:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLfFy46mjsoh3QYyLiy830pYTD7PpX5pfU>

Photos of Award Winners are here:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/16v7ZtQcoGDKwxtFr9hRwocZBRnDzt0V3?usp=sharing>

Hashtags: #DalaiLama90 #WeAreAllTheSame #IlluminateFilmFestival #MicroShorts
#OneSecondPerYear

ABOUT ILLUMINATE FILM FESTIVAL

ILLUMINATE is the world’s leading film festival for conscious cinema, presenting transformational films that inspire personal growth and social impact. Learn more at www.illuminatefilmfestival.com.

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