

# The Birmingham News

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## 'Six blocks' alters view of world

by John Archibald

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Make no mistake about it. Birmingham is a small town.

But I was made to wonder last week. What if it were smaller?

What if it were *Six Blocks Wide*?

Would we care more? Would we stand with stiffer backbones, assuming more responsibility and demanding more accountability? Or would we just let things go as we often do, biding our time and biting our tongues?

It was there in a packed Carver Theatre that it was forced upon me. I was there for a screening of the short film *Six Blocks Wide* -- written by Renaissance Cop Teresa Thorne and shot in Birmingham -- when I got the feeling this was bigger than a bit of film, and we ought to treat it as such. And we ought to treat this town as if it were smaller.

*Six Blocks Wide.*

The film is set in a poor neighborhood pounded by blight and ruled by a powerful drug lord. It opens like a splash of light from a painting, with young Lauryn McClain prodding the dirt, trying to plant a peach in front of her Gran's house.

As it plays out, Gran, an old woman played by *In the Heat of the Night* star Tonea Stewart, stands up to threats and danger and maybe even death. She stands like a beacon against power and corrupting influences, even though she never physically rises from the chair on her front porch.

"It may be your business, but it's our world," she says defiantly as the gangster demands that she stay out of his affairs. "All six blocks of it."

It's our world. All however-many blocks of it.

Thorne -- author, screenwriter, yogi, retired Birmingham Police Captain and now executive director of the downtown security agency City Action Partnership -- said she based the story on images she took from patrolling housing projects as a young cop:

\* A young girl scratching a shallow hole in a patch of dry ground while unseen trouble looms nearby.

\* Families planting gardens on tiny squares of dirt, dragging humanity from places seemingly bereft of it.

\* People doing what is right when all the world tells them to mind their own business.

The film is directed by Ukrainian transplant Yuri Shapochka, shot by Hoover's David Brower and filmed in Norwood. It is little more than 10 minutes long, but it is much bigger than that. It is ...

*Six Blocks Wide.*

There was discussion after the movie of what such a film really could mean to Birmingham and to all of us. It is on one level a potent answer to the ever-expanding "don't snitch" movement in urban areas. It is a call to take back our neighborhoods, to stand in the face of trouble.

But it is something else, too. It is a call to stand up for our beliefs, our values, ourselves always. It is a demand that we value our neighborhoods and our cities -- whether they are six blocks wide or sixty miles long.

"Now is the time to stand for something or fall for anything," said Stewart, a professor as well as an acclaimed actress. "If one person makes a stand, all others will rise up."

I hope it is so. It has to be so. Thorne has stood, along with her cast and crew.

Who will be next?

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Link: [http://blog.al.com/archiblog/2008/07/six\\_blocks\\_alters\\_view\\_of\\_worl.html](http://blog.al.com/archiblog/2008/07/six_blocks_alters_view_of_worl.html)

Shape Films: [www.shapefilms.com](http://www.shapefilms.com)