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## Sisterly: Nina Vallado's Story

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# Sisterly

Nina Vallado's Story



▲ Karen, Nina and Lisa after the screening of "Sisterly" at Andrews University last year.

In May 2017, Nina Vallado graduated magna cum laude with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in documentary film. Her senior project, a short documentary called "Sisterly," talks about Nina's relationship with her sister, Lisa, who is on the autism spectrum.

"It's strange to put into words what it was like growing up with Lisa.

"She's my sister, and I love her. I interacted with her by the means I knew but, because there was no verbal communication, I didn't really know her. She could repeat things she'd been trained to say, such as responses to, 'How was your day?' or 'What is your favorite color?', but her interests, her personality, her dreams — they were a mystery to me.

"Telling our story through film taught me what sisterhood is. Before this, I based my idea of what sisterhood should be on what my mom and her sisters had, or what my friends and their sisters had. But sisterhood

is a unique bond that you create with your own sisters.

"My sisters, Karen and Lisa, and I have our own special sisterhood. We met Lisa where she was. It was never the worst thing in the world that Lisa couldn't speak; we just found things we could do together — things Lisa loved, like puzzles and Memory, and everything Disney. Sisterhood can be complicated, messy or broken, but it's still sisterhood. And we always have had that.

"Lisa and I have always had connection and intimacy, and now it's really just a matter of exploring those things. Since Lisa began expressing herself in writing at age 16, we've had a breakthrough, and my film kind of gives viewers

a glimpse of that, but I'm still searching. The breakthrough wasn't the end; my film just gave me a place to start, and I haven't stopped.

"I didn't really have a dream for 'Sisterly.' That may be sad, but I think I just didn't want to be disappointed. I submitted it to some small, local film festivals, but none of them accepted it, so I started looking for free festivals, and found the student Oscars. I had nothing to lose. Out of the blue, I got an email from them that started with, 'Congratulations!' My first thought was, *What?! I'd made it into the semi-finals!* A month later, I received notification that I'd made it to the finals. I could go to the Oscars. I also look forward to sharing my film in churches and schools, because they are communities that need a voice for autism. I'm proud to be able to share a voice to that end with my sister."

For more real stories of real people at Andrews University, including a longer version of Nina's story, visit [andrews.edu/stories](http://andrews.edu/stories). ■

*Editor's note: Unfortunately, Nina's film did not win.*

*Becky St. Clair is the media communications manager at Andrews University.*



▲ Nina (left) and Lisa in 1987.