

BROOKLYN

Fort Greene middle schoolers are making movies about local seniors

Professional filmmakers volunteered their time

BY [MARK MORALES](#) / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

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Jason Critchlow, 14, l. and Raiden McLean, 14, film documentary at the Willoughby Senior Center in Fort Greene.

Fort Greene resident C-Allah Coombs leaned back in his chair and stared deep into the camera as he talked about his worst day on the Fort Hamilton High School basketball team.

"It wasn't good. Dean Meminger scored 50 points on me," said [Coombs](#). "And he wasn't even a good shooter - just a good defender."

Coombs, 63, recounted his front row seat to the Rice High School prodigy and former New York Knicks's scoring barrage as part of a filmmaking program for 12 students from the Urban Assembly Academy of Arts and Letters are profiling a group of Fort Greene seniors and turning their stories into two-minute documentaries.

Coombs recalled Meminger's hot hand swishing basket after basket as if it happened yesterday.

"No one was able to stop Dean Meminger," said Coombs. "The game wasn't close at all."

The nonprofit group Old School Films matched the students up with members from the Willoughby Senior Center in the [Walt Whitman](#) Houses.

Professional filmmakers who volunteered their time and equipment gave the kids a crash course as they recorded their interviews on high definition cameras at the center on Wednesday.

"We're pairing up young people who want to learn how to tell stories and senior citizens with stories to tell," said the group's founder [Aaron Lubarsky](#).

The Emmy-winning filmmaker came up with the idea 10 years ago while shooting a documentary about his grandmother's final years in a California nursing home. The more he talked to other seniors in the home, the more he knew he could bridge the gap between two generations.

"I just felt like there was this gold mine of wisdom and stories," said Lubarsky.

"People would get so happy when you would ask them questions. They had really valuable bits of wisdom to share so I just made the connection."

The students are slated to start putting together their short films using professional editing software and high powered laptops next week.

The finished products will be screened in May and posted online at [oldschoolfilms.org](#).

Bedford-Stuyvesant student [Frederick Flowers](#), 14, filmed Coombs and was blown away by his stories of coaching troubled youths in the neighborhood.

"I really learned a lot," said Flowers. "It makes me want to stay in school and get an education."

Local activist and Whitman Houses resident Rasheem Allah, 64, talked about cutting class as a boy and the new dangers facing Fort Greene youths today.

"I wanted to let them know that there are opportunities to learn and that they shouldn't be squandered," said Allah.

"If you don't do the right thing, you have a place with the wrong doers."

[Raiden McLean](#), 14, was filming Allah and heard his message loud and clear.

"I learned that gangs and violence always lead to bad places," he said.

mmorales@nydailynews.com

[Twitter.com/NYDNMarkMorales](https://twitter.com/NYDNMarkMorales)