

# A Rose by Any Other Name

**M**y name is Millicent Simmonds and I am 14 years old. When I was three years old I started going to a school for the deaf named Jean Massieu School for the Deaf in Salt Lake City. I loved telling great stories and making everyone laugh at school and I made a lot of friends. Growing up, I always wanted to be a police officer. I love danger and really wanted to fight bad guys—and be an awesome hero!

When I was about six or seven, a drama teacher at Jean Massieu saw me sign my stories. She asked my mom if it would be okay if I joined the drama club at such a young age. Normally only junior high school students could be in the drama club. My mother thought it was a great idea, so I joined.

Almost all of our plays were from Shakespeare, and in my first role I played Puck, an evil fairy from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The drama club had both deaf and hearing people in it. The ones who could hear would be our voice while all of the deaf kids signed. It was pretty cool and we had so much fun! And we were good too—whenever we would enter a competition we would always win second or third place. But still, I never thought about becoming an actress.

## **Wonderstruck**

Not long before I turned 13 my drama teacher saw a flier online for a movie that was looking for an 11-13 year old deaf girl. My drama teacher immediately thought of me, so she emailed my mom telling her I needed to try out for this part. So I did, just for her. My mom took videos of me on her phone while I acted out the different scenes they wanted to see. I was not expecting to get the part but I still thought it would be fun to audition.

Not long after that I found out the name of the movie I was auditioning for. It was called *Wonderstruck*, based on a book of the same name that I read years ago! I could remember how much I loved the book so I had given it to some of my friends to read, and they loved it as much as I did. I thought, “Wow, the guy who wrote this book is amazing! He should write more.”

A few weeks later, my mom got a call from the casting company in New York saying they wanted to see me do more. I was so excited and surprised! So we recorded more scenes and sent them in. Again, I wasn't expecting anything to happen after that, but I still kept asking my mom if she had heard from them. She said she hadn't, but even if I didn't get the part I should be happy they wanted to see me act out more scenes because it meant they really liked what I did. Having her tell me that was reassuring, and it helped me feel like I really did a good job and they thought I was a good actress.

## **Start Spreading the News, I'm Leaving Today...**

A couple weeks later my mom got a call from the casting company. They told her they wanted to fly us to New York to meet the director! I was so excited—I had never been to New York City before!

That weekend my mom and I flew to New York. It was so big and beautiful. All the buildings are huge, and the people there always looked busy. There were a million things I wanted to do while I was in New York, but I was going to be there only for a short time.

When I got to the casting agency I met the director, Todd Haynes, and the cinematographer, Ed Lachman. They were both so nice and friendly. They had me put on a wig and a costume. Todd asked me to sit down and try to act scared. So I did. It was short, but it was also fun. It was such an honor to meet with all the people at the casting agency, especially Todd and Ed.

The next day, my mom and I got in the car to go to the airport. She got a call and had a surprised look on her face. I asked her what was up. She said, “The casting company wants to FaceTime with you to say goodbye.” So we got to the airport, went through security, and called them. They held up a sign that said, “You are Rose!!” (Rose is the character I auditioned for.) I didn't know what to say—I never thought I would get the part. More than 200 girls tried out for this role. My mom and I just stood in the airport screaming. We cried and hugged each other until

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we got on the plane. We didn't call my dad, my brothers or anyone, we just decided to tell them when we got home. I don't remember even talking to my mom on the flight home—we would just look at each other and smile, thinking it was all a dream.

### And That's a Wrap

The movie was going to be shot in New York, so I moved there with my mom, my oldest brother and my twin sisters. Filming started at the end of April 2016. I loved everyone on the set. They were so nice—and even learned sign language for me! They would sign “Good morning Millie,” or “Good job!” It was amazing.

I remember my favorite day on set. I had to cut a really expensive wig that I was wearing when the movie started. I was so nervous because I had only one chance to cut the wig on camera. I practiced with other wigs that were harder to cut—I didn't want to mess this up. But I kept forgetting little things, like taking the bow out of my hair before I cut it.

Todd was so nice and so patient and kept telling me that we wouldn't start shooting the scene until I felt ready. When I was finally ready and we started filming I did everything right—I even remembered the bow! I turned around to see the crew clapping and my interpreter crying. It was such a great feeling. I wanted to make Todd proud, and I think I did.

### Bitten by the Acting Bug

We were filming in a huge, beautiful house that was supposed to be my character Rose's house in New Jersey. It had an amazing backyard that was right by the river. I went outside with my cut wig and just sat there.

After a while my mom came and sat by me. She said, “Do you remember New Year's Eve last year?” I said “No, what about it?” She said, “You told me how excited you were to see what 2016 would bring for you. But did you

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*Millicent on the set of Wonderstruck with director Todd Haynes and her interpreter Lynnette Taylor (© Myles Aronowitz, courtesy of Amazon Studios and Roadside Attractions)*



*Millicent at HLA A2017 Convention with Cristina Duarte from InnoCaption*



*Wonderstruck had its world premiere at the 70th Cannes Film Festival in May 2017. Here Millicent is pictured on the red carpet with screenwriter Brian Selznick. (© Jeanne R. Berney, courtesy of Amazon Studios and Roadside Attractions)*

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ever think you would be in New York filming a movie?” I said, “Definitely not!”

My mom told me to look around, breathe, and take it all in. I will never forget that moment or that feeling. I felt like the luckiest girl in the world. I think that is the moment I decided this is what I wanted to do.

### Becoming a “Role” Model

I love acting. I love everything about it. I want to show people that those of us who are deaf or have a hearing loss can act—that we can do anything. Our stories are important, and we should be proud.

I am incredibly grateful for the technology that exists today. I have a cochlear implant so I can hear some sounds, and I also text, use FaceTime and videophones. But I do not vocalize, I primarily use sign language to communicate.

Rose had a father who forced her to speak. I felt similar to her because of that. My biological father tried to force me to speak. I felt as though he didn’t like that I couldn’t hear. But my mom learned sign language and she taught

my brothers. My stepdad—who is my real dad now—also learned. I feel very lucky that my family can communicate with me and loves me enough to learn the language I speak.

I think a lot of children who are deaf or hard of hearing grow up similar to Rose. She couldn’t communicate with anyone. I can communicate with my friends and family and I understand the frustration of trying to communicate in a hearing world. That’s why I feel Rose’s story in *Wonderstruck* is so important.

The hearing world needs to better understand the stories of people who are deaf or have hearing loss. Hopefully, if and when they see this movie, they will realize how important it is to be more patient and supportive of people like me who can’t hear. Deaf and hard of hearing kids need to feel important and valued, and they need to be able to communicate with their families. I’m so thankful to Brian Selznick for writing this beautiful story. It’s important for those of us who can’t hear to feel like hearing people who want to learn to better communicate with us and let us tell our stories. Brian is hearing and he did that for us, and I will always be so grateful to him because of that. I hope more people do the same thing. **HLM**



© Mary Cybulski, courtesy of Amazon Studios and Roadside Attractions

## About *Wonderstruck*

Based on Brian Selznick’s critically acclaimed novel, *Wonderstruck* tells the story of Ben and Rose, two children from two different eras who secretly wish their lives were different. Ben longs for the father he has never known, while Rose dreams of a mysterious actress whose life she chronicles in a scrapbook. When Ben discovers a puzzling clue in his home and Rose reads an enticing headline in the newspaper, both children set out on quests to find what they are missing that unfold with mesmerizing symmetry.

The two deaf lead actors are Millicent Simmonds, who plays Rose in 1927, and Oakes Fegley, who plays Ben in 1977. There are a total of seven deaf actors in the film.

Directed by Todd Haynes

Written by Brian Selznick, based on his novel

Starring Julianne Moore, Oakes Fegley, Michelle Williams and introducing Millicent Simmonds

Amazon Studios and Roadside Attractions will release *Wonderstruck* in theaters October 20, 2017. For more information visit [wonderstruckmovie.com](http://wonderstruckmovie.com).

Oakes Fegley

Julianne Moore

with  
Michelle Williams

and introducing  
Millicent Simmonds



WORLD PREMIERE  
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

It's not what you look at that matters,  
it's what you see.



A FILM BY TODD HAYNES

# WONDERSTRUCK

SCREENPLAY BY  
BRIAN SELZNICK

DIRECTED BY  
TODD HAYNES



IN THEATERS THIS FALL

