

American Dream with all its promises and expectations. This illusion of success only stands in Wuornos' way of actions that might have led her to a normal life. *Monster* vividly combines these emotional dreams, desperation for love and harsh brutality, all of which you see flicker across Theron's face—all of it uncontrollable in Wuornos' life.

Monster is also about the ambiguities of justice. Wuornos' first murder is, clearly, a matter of self-defense. Yet she cannot go to the police, who have only previously beaten and sexually abused her. The attack from her first victim seems to turn on a rage in her she tries desperately to quell.

But to support her little American Dream, Wuornos must continue with the only thing at which she can make sufficient money and, with the realization that she deserves more than her

customers give, she justifies her actions with revenge theory. "I'm not a bad person," she tells Wall. "I'm a real good person...people like you and me go down every single day."

And *Monster* is convincing enough to make you understand that.

The film can be a little one-note—even Quentin Tarantino knows when to add a quiet, thoughtful moment to a blood bath. And we see very little of Wuornos and Wall at home. Are they happy? Why won't Wall get a job?

But Theron, who is a prolific actress but is mostly handed the sexy girl co-star role (*The Cider House Rules*, *The Italian Job*), has found the opportunity of her lifetime in this character and will no doubt be rewarded; she's already the frontrunner to win the Golden Globe for Best Actress in a Drama. She deserves it. **J**

At home in *Our House*

Documentary chronicles lives of the developmentally disabled

BY JIM RADOSTA

We all know how difficult it can be to grow up gay. And when one's gender identity is uncertain, that person must contend with an additional layer of social ignorance and discrimination.

Now imagine, on top of all this, being born developmentally disabled.

Director Sevan Matossian's *Our House*, which opens Jan. 16 at Hollywood Theatre, takes the audience into an institution for developmentally disabled people, condensing one year of their lives into a tight 83-minute documentary.

The most fascinating story is that of Laura, a 21-year-old who has been diagnosed with Tourette's syndrome, Williams syndrome, fetal alcohol syndrome, obsessive compulsive disorder and autism. She has a number of problems—uncontrollable outbursts, beating and biting herself—but is painfully aware of her condition. She frequently threatens suicide, believing that all of her troubles will vanish in heaven.

Laura also undergoes an odd gender transformation, convincing herself that her penis was cut off at birth and demanding to be recognized as a boy. During an interview she shares her fantasy of having an African American girlfriend. (But she later changes her mind after seeing the film *Bride of Chucky* and decides she'd rather be a witch.)

Our House also introduces us to Tim W., a



Laura personifies the conflicting distress of disability and gender development in *Our House*

47-year-old who has been diagnosed with mild retardation and cerebral palsy but whose main affliction is alcoholism, which eventually gets him kicked out of the home. The other resident profiled is Tim S., who was born with Down syndrome and who also breaks the rules because of an addiction, landing himself in jail for stealing cigarettes.

Amid all of this despair, however, Matossian manages to incorporate moments that are amusing yet not cruel; one memorable scene shows the residents arguing with each other about who is the most retarded. The low-budget film, although not an easy one to watch, is incredibly enlightening and ultimately hopeful. **J**

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