

An account of watching
all these
SUMMERS
with Povl Christian Henningsen

Tuesday 7th January 2025 at his flat in Aarhus

I go back to Denmark for Christmas and have planned to show my father the film. I'm nervous about it, so I keep postponing. He is nervous about it, so he keeps postponing. After New Year's, I call him and insist that it's important for me to show it to him before I go back to London. He reluctantly agrees and we arrange a time. Tuesday 7th January at 2pm. 'How do you think you will feel about watching it?' I ask him. 'It will probably go straight into my bloodstream' he answers.

I arrive at his flat. I have brought my laptop and place it on the small table in front of the sofa. I feel a sense of unease, aware that he is still depressed. Will he be able to cope with watching the film? How will it affect him?

We begin watching. Like Pete did, my father starts making small utterances while viewing. He is affected by the discrepancy between his current state and his enthusiasm when he visited me in London, encountering strangers at 4am. 'It's nice to see, but what has happened since? It's tough for me to watch, because, back then, I was feeling well.'

Anything can become a reminder to my father of his inability to eat. He hears the kettle boiling in Pete's flat and makes a comparison to his own situation: 'He can just go have a cup of coffee and a cigarette. And something to eat.'

'Breakfast', Pete remarks, having popped out pills from packages.

'Yes,' my dad exclaims in response, 'breakfast!'

The film cuts from Pete looking out the window of his flat in Seven Sisters to an evening scene of my father's house in Sondrup. My father initially neither recognises the place nor himself through the window. 'Does he have a house?' he asks, assuming we are still following Pete. 'It's your house in Sondrup, can't you see that?' 'Oh... yes.'

Witnessing himself talk about going into a monastery in his own home he tries to make sense of a timeline. 'Is that after I had the cancer diagnosis?'

When Pete begins to talk about the suicide of his neighbour, my father expresses a sense of recognition. After lighting his cigarette in the dark in the kitchen, Pete says: 'There's no help for people with depression and things like that. Life becomes... You're isolated until you die.'

'That's it', my dad states.

'What is?' I ask.

'You're isolated until you die.'

As he starts slowly walking along the green bushes in Sondrup, I suddenly feel myself becoming very aware of the narration that's about to come. My account of his earlier experience of depression and my own relationship to it. Will he recognise himself in it?

When I was 13, my father entered a severe depression that would last six years. I rarely saw him and when we did meet, he would cry. When I was 19, he found a new zest for life. He wanted to escape the memory of the depression and to relativise its gravity.

He sighs and begins to cry. 'Memories,' he says 'I'm reminded how awful it is.'

'Don't get too concerned,' I urge, in some kind of failed attempt to alleviate my own anxiety of the effects the film might have on him.

'But that's what I am, Therese. You can't tell me not to be.'

He is moved by the many fresh flowers on Pete's father's grave. 'If I die, can you gather some people to bring some flowers for me? Make sure I get a good burial.' I briefly begin to imagine what his funeral might look like and who might be there. I try not to feel burdened by the sense of responsibility his comment instils.

'How much is left?' He knows he has agreed to view the whole film but now seems keen for it to end. 'Not so much.' I'm aware that the scene that will be most difficult for him to watch is yet to come.

We're sitting on the sofa. The laptop is placed on a small table in front of us, the same one I placed my camera on when filming the scene of my father and I facing each other after he had just moved into the flat. He sees me in the frame. 'Who is holding the camera?' His question puzzles me, as if someone else would have suddenly appeared in the room to witness our exchange. 'No one. It's on the table.'

The floral armchair is next to us. I look at the chair, then back at the screen, becoming overwhelmed with the experience of viewing the film with him in the exact same place where I filmed the scene. An evocation of the time that has passed between then and sitting with him now. I look at him. He has tears in his eyes, as he watches himself crying.

'Can you handle watching it?'
'You're telling me I have to.'

He listens to himself: 'I just hope you don't think I'm superfluous...'
'You don't think that, do you?' he asks me, just seconds before his voice in the film echoes 'You don't think that, do you?' I'm perplexed by his accidental prediction.

He is visibly relieved when the film has finished. I feel grateful that he managed to watch the whole film. 'Thank you for agreeing to watch it.'

'It's moving to watch,' he says. 'It's got a nice pace; it dwells. It raises existential questions. Messages for people to use if they want to.'
'What kind of messages?'
'Love overcomes depression.'
'But do you think that?'
'It didn't cut it for me.'

'What other messages?'
'Fight for life. It doesn't come on its own.'

He is compelled to view himself as someone who was once able but is no longer. 'It's sad to see such a decline. It's a story of decline. But it's me who's the protagonist. I'm not so fond of that.'

'I will have a hard time sleeping tonight' he says, clearly affected by the experience.

'Do you have other reflections on the film?' I ask him.

'I will think of other things to say. Now that I will struggle to sleep tonight, I'll have time to think about it.'

Though he's sincere, I can tell he's aware he's made a joke. I laugh, in recognition of a shared appreciation of the tragicomic.

ALL THESE SUMMERS
By Therese Henningsen
UK Premiere
Creative Nonfiction Film Weekend
The Rio Cinema, London, 6th July 2025