

## Family Album and Other Images

Stephen Connolly (29' 2020)

### Voiceover Transcript

S

Put it on record.

J

Ok?

S

I guess so?

J

Ready to start?

S

Yeah. I guess so.

J

Ok. So I am going to ask you a series of questions and they are roughly chronological.

S

Ok.

J

But the first one isn't.

S

Ok

J

How did the making of this film arise?

S

In the first half of this last year,

the world split into many little places,

Within a mile of my home

I walked the dog everyday, taking a small camera.

If you get close to this screen, the images break up.

S

Back in the studio, I fetch out the family pictures.

My father died two years ago;

So I'll take this space to review the images of his time.

S

Can you see it?

The abacus on the walker.

His calculator, at age four –

In a yard, of a two up and two down, in Old Trafford

Dad was the first in his family to get an education.

And he stayed on, at the university.

The best reason to continue research work he said,

Was to avoid military service.

As he finished his work, the realms of the possible expanded

President Kennedy spoke of navigating the oceans of space,

of landing a man on the Moon

and returning him safely to the Earth.

My father boarded a boat to North America

With a hundred pounds in his pocket.

S

As teenagers in Manchester,

My parents were friends of friends

She came to Canada to marry.

This was the sunshine of their lives.

J

So where did that idea about your dad  
not wanting to assert authority – where did that come from?

S

As I've reflected on these photographs, I've really thought about  
Dad's presence in the family. And one thing I've found really  
interesting is that he was really unwilling to assert authority.

Which came out in a really strong way by the way he spoke.  
He always wanted to approach a subject from the side – like a crab

So he never wanted to give a determination –  
as you might expect a father in a family to do –  
that's really something I've taken from him  
and its really infected all my films...

because the films are always trying to step away  
from asserting an opinion or a view.

J

Hmmm – and film offers that – if you want to take it.

S

The England they left behind was a small place  
Dad was required to study Latin to study science  
Mum was not allowed to continue her Schooling  
And forbidden to wear trousers.

North America allowed them to stretch and reach  
They could make their space

S

It is summer now  
The dog still needs walking.  
Voices fill my headphones.

*(Melange of podcast voices)*

S

I was born a Canadian  
My brother and sister followed five and six years later,  
Let's get the sequence of these images right.  
My injured arm from falling from the shed.  
I visited the house in Philadelphia.

The owners allowed me to roam the garden.  
I started with the shaded areas behind the upper floor  
And there is the garden shed  
Dad made me a shelter on its roof  
Next to a bamboo hedge at the far side of the property

A pool has dug out the garden  
This space is no longer ours.  
After an hour filming  
I realise this has been a mistake  
We have been erased from the house

#### SPACE MOVIE Camera records Missile in Flight - NEWSREEL

A Titan Two missile lifts from its pad  
Its flight down the South Atlantic target range makes history  
This is the booster that will carry the Gemini space vehicle  
on the nations next manned space flight programme.  
What makes test stand as a milestone, is a camera  
that is mounted on the second stage booster.

It has been designed to record spectacular closeups.

As the Titan nears the fringe of space,  
the first stage shuts down.

Now watch. The second stage ignites,  
and with a might blast and pushes the first stage away in  
shattered pieces. This is what an astronaut in the Gemini will see.

At 17,000 miles an hour the second stage leaves  
the abandoned first stage far behind as it  
soars 5000 miles downrange. The curvature of the earth  
is plainly visible.

Through the magic of the camera,  
earthlings take their first ride into space.

*[Apollo recordings]*

S

I asked my siblings about their experience of North America.

My own memory is fragile, shaken by the house

The perception of place is not stable

Here are my brother and sister at the beach.

They both said of North America-

No impressions, colours, textures, sounds.

No memories. Or feelings.

A Russian Cosmonaut wrote –  
that after a few weeks in space –

He had tremendous difficulty remembering the smell of grass,  
the rains in summer, the snow, the faces of his family and friends  
All these impressions he wrote, only re-appeared in dreams.

S

After the man walked on the moon, Dad's work was finished.

He was re-assigned to military projects.

This was work he did not want to do.

The pressure increased.

Dad had a breakdown and was confined to hospital.

S

On the military contract

Secrecy was enforced by security;

An agent sat with dad and walked him to the washroom.

From their early days as a couple,

my parents agreed not to speak about his work,

Keeping it private was to protect each other.



In North America, the family was shielded by this code.

But this silence did not protect him.

*[Apollo recordings]*

S

Dad was prescribed Lithium Carbonate for his condition

He took it for years.

A search tells me the side effects of this drug are not limited to –

hand tremors , increased urination, mild thirst, diarrhoea, vomiting, drowsiness, muscular weakness, lack of coordination, giddiness, blurred vision, ringing in the ears, confusion, poor memory or lack of awareness, fainting, fast pounding or irregular heart beat or pulse, blue colour and pain in fingers and toes, coldness of the arms and legs, dizziness, eye pain, headache, noise in the ears, vision problem, blurred vision, burning feeling in the chest or stomach, chills, difficulty speaking, drooling, dry mouth, fruit-like breath odour, increased hunger, increased urination, indigestion, irregular heartbeat...

S

The question of how the photographs situate  
the family in the world... is kind of quite tricky,  
mainly because the photographs are kind of quite ritualistic.

Everybody has these kind of photographs,

I think yeah, as a body

J

Yes I think we do - but your family,  
the way they are portrayed in the film,  
they are like this little bubble – a kind of unit.

S

Oh right – yes.

J

And when I think of family photographs,  
I think of other people; neighbours and friends,  
a kind of wider people - particularly if you stay  
in one place to grow up as opposed to move around,  
so I guess, somehow the family seem quite isolated,  
the way you are portraying them in the film,  
and perhaps your father in some ways  
- is also isolated –  
there are lots of pictures of him on his own - for example.

S

Yeah. I think that is a really astute comment.

S

Shortly after this time,  
my parents moved the family to Europe.

A haven.

A haven.

I was only told about the breakdown 45 years later.

I had never known why the family had made this big move.  
Learning this in my own middle age, overturned my understanding  
Of this migration and the conditions of my childhood.  
If you get close to these images, they appear to break up.

J

And I'll come back to Pavlov,  
And you taking this elderly dog for walks  
during this time and filming along the way  
Again, I wanted to ask you,  
what space that has afforded you for thinking

S

So maybe something I've reflected on while making this film is how  
patterns repeat themselves.

In terms of my father, he left his home and the things  
that he knew and the family knew to try something different

J

Interesting thinking about this thing of a break.

You started your career as social worker,  
supporting people to navigate the world  
and now you are a filmmaker,  
using sound and image to navigate the world

S

We cannot call it inherited,  
but we can see patterns repeating themselves

S

Photographs can be framed as patterns of light sensitive chemicals

We can choose not to read them as images

Their codes can remain unspoken

Their silence will protect us.

After the dog has been walked,

We slouch towards home.

ENDS

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