

Press Kit

INSTRUCTIONS ON PARTING

A FILM BY AMY JENKINS

DOCUMENTARY / 95 min / ENGLISH / ©2018 / DIGITAL DCP / 5.1 AUDIO

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Short Synopsis

“Instructions on Parting” weaves breathtaking artistic footage with cinema verité to tell an elegiac story about transformation, grief, and the essential nature of the collective human journey. Told in an unconventional visual style, the story evolves from the viewpoint of Director Amy Jenkins, whose first child is born while she negotiates the cancer diagnosis and slide toward death of three of her closest family members. By chronicling with her camera to interrogate loss, the filmmaker leads us to a bold and daring acceptance of our inevitable end.

Long Synopsis

“Instructions on Parting” is an observational portrait of an American family navigating the cycles of birth and death, echoing the natural world around them. Told in an unconventional visual style, the story evolves from the viewpoint of Director Amy Jenkins, whose first child is born while she negotiates the cancer diagnosis and slide toward death of three of her closest family members. Profound and visually stunning, the film offers a rare and intimate view of the human experience.

Filmed over a decade with the artist’s keen attention to symbolism, visceral touch, and the passage of time, the film maintains a vintage aesthetic with 4:3 DV footage. A hand-held camera records intimate interaction between Amy as cameraperson and her family, while clips from the artist’s obsessive act of recording with video, answering machine, and journaling, narrate the family story as it unfolds. The film favors visual metaphor over plot; in breathtaking splendor, the natural world transforms to reveal poignancy in the family story and to anchor the documentary footage in artistic gravitas.

The story begins as Amy leaves New York to marry John in New Hampshire and later becomes pregnant. This idyllic beginning takes a turn when it is revealed that Amy’s sister, Linda, has been diagnosed with ovarian cancer, and Amy’s mother, Ellen, has advanced breast cancer. After Amy gives birth, she and infant Audrey fly back and forth across the country to tend to Linda and Ellen in Park City, Utah. As Linda slips closer to death, Amy’s mother chooses to postpone her own cancer treatment to care for her daughter. Linda and Ellen pass in rapid succession. Shortly after, Amy’s brother, Craig, places Amy’s hand over a lump in his abdomen. “Maybe it’s a tumor,” he jokes.

The family—now just Amy, Craig, and their father—once again must grapple with the possibility of inevitable loss. As Craig strives to embody acceptance of his mortality, Amy resolves to be fully present with him in each moment, even as she clings to the tangibility of Craig by recording their experiences. In her attempt to mediate the family story through her camera, the filmmaker echoes the family's inability to adequately convey emotion in words. Searching for a way to let go, she turns her lens to the natural world and finds solace in the unrelenting pace of life and death as it unfolds in her yard.

The passage of time becomes a psychological focus of the film—it drags and flies. We witness baby Audrey's first steps, first words, and her blossoming personhood, as, in turn, we watch the slowness of illness morph into the quickness of death. Told with gorgeous sparsity and understated grace, the film distills life's counterpoints into a sequence of intimate moments in which nothing—but also everything—occurs. In doing so, it elucidates the most compelling and often challenging aspect of the human experience—unconditional love.

"Instructions on Parting" weaves magnificent artistic footage with cinema verite to tell an elegiac story about transformation, grief, and the essential nature of the collective human journey. By chronicling with her camera to interrogate loss, the filmmaker leads us to a bold and daring acceptance of our inevitable end.

Quotes:

"Amy Jenkins is exploring the cruel mystery of mortality with exceptional tenderness and courage." **Michael Almereyda, Filmmaker**

"Amy Jenkins' incisive filmmaking brings to the surface our deepest human and spiritual selves. In the conveyance of this most modern media, her narrative of personal loss brings us back to something ancient and unsayable, using the lens as Virginia Woolf wielded her pen: with a stark intelligence that finds—in the comfort of the familiar and familial, the crevices of the interior and domestic sphere—the nearly invisible filaments that connect us to each other and to the wider world. Her work is daring and unforgiving, sweet and disturbing. It upends and reinvigorates our conceptions of self and situation, and is deeply, startlingly relevant."

Marci Nelligan, Poet/Writer

"Instructions on Parting is, in addition to being a tender and trenchant timeline of a family's ability to undergo and articulate its generation and decline, a visceral and encyclopedic collage of the technologies humankind has created in the past century to capture itself, to desperately grasp each being as it/they/we enter the Abstract. Featuring time-lapse photography, 1970s faded slideshows, phone answering machines, mini-DV footage and nature surveillance cams, the film is a necessary and humbling acknowledgment of the failure of these machines to slow the inevitable collapse of our anatomical being. It is a sensitive testament to their brief progress."

Christina Davis, Curator of Poetry, Harvard University

Creative Team

DIRECTOR/PRODUCER/EDITOR Amy Jenkins is an American artist whose installations, films, and photography have been exhibited, screened and collected internationally. Her works, which focus on themes such as familial relationships, desire, and gender identity, have been exhibited at museums including The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; The Haifa Museum, Haifa, Israel; Oberösterreichisches Landesmuseum, Linz, Austria; the Akron Art Museum, Ohio; and Palm Beach ICA, FL. Her solo exhibitions include Athens Institute for Contemporary Art, GA; Brattleboro Museum, VT; Kustera Tilton Gallery, NYC, Sioux City Art Center, IA, and John Michael Kohler Art Center, WI. Jenkins' has been a LEF Foundation Robert Flaherty Film Seminar Fellow, and a two-time nominee for the CalArts Alpert Award in Film/Video. Jenkins' first film, the short experimental documentary *Audrey Superhero*, was reviewed in the *NY Times*, and her artwork has been reviewed in many publications, including *The NY Times*, *ARTnews*, *Bomb*, *Performing Arts Journal*, and *The Village Voice*. Visit her website at: www.amyjenkins.net

PRODUCER Mary Kerr is a seasoned film professional with over 20 years experience in programming, arts administration and documentary filmmaking. She is currently consulting on several documentaries in various stages of production and most recently produced *One Cut, One Life*, by Lucia Small and Ed Pincus. She has programmed for the Sundance, Los Angeles, and SilverDocs film festivals and worked for the Robert Flaherty Film Seminar, Creative Capital, and Scandinavia House. She served on funding panels for the NEA, NYSCA, ITVS, POV and Tribeca Gucci Fund, and juries for the Ashland, Full Frame, Sarasota, and Nordisk Panorama film festivals, amongst others. She holds a B.S. in Journalism from the University of Maryland and currently lives in Brooklyn, NY.

EDITOR Bara Jichova Tyson is a filmmaker and editor who often collaborates with artists including Hal Hartley, Michael Almereyda, and Narcissister. She is finishing her first feature documentary film *Consuming Others*. Her short documentary film, *The Hatch House*, won the best short experimental documentary at the 2016 FAFF in California, and was the official selection of the 2016 Architecture and Design Film Festival in NYC and 2016 AMDOCS. In 2015 she co-produced and edited *Built On Narrow Land*, a feature-length documentary directed by Malachi Connolly. She is a 2016 recipient of a MacDowell Colony fellowship. Originally from the Czech Republic, she now lives and works in New York City.

CONSULTING EDITOR Laure Sullivan is a Film Editor, Story Consultant and Filmmaker living and working in Brooklyn, NY. She has worked on feature docs, narrative features, television programs and series. Her debut film was *Listen Up! The Lives of Quincy Jones*. Since then she has worked with directors Michael Moore, Josh Fox, Mira Nair, Gaylen Ross and others. Her personal work has shown at various venues and has received support from Sundance, IDFA, ITVS, and NYSCA. Awards include: Cine Golden Eagle,

Emmy, and Best Editing WIFF. Films edited by her have premiered at Sundance Film Festival, TIFF, NYFF, Cork Film Festival, and Galway Film Fleadh.

COMPOSER Noah Hoffeld, a cellist, composer and producer, is equally at home across many genres, including solo cello performance, film scores and rock song vocals. A graduate of Juilliard, he's been featured with artists like Natalie Merchant, Philip Glass, and Renee Fleming, and his cello solos are heard in *A Walk in the Woods* with Robert Redford. His cello opens the recent album by Krishna Das, *Trust in the Heart*.

SOUND DESIGNER Jim Dawson has collaborated with The Wooster Group, Trisha Brown Dance Company, Jay Scheib, Cynthia Hopkins, The Collapsible Giraffe, Findlay/Sandsmark, Door 10 and Jim Findlay. He has made soundscapes for Jean Butler, Deganit Shemy, Rebecca Warner, Diane Madden and Jon Kinzel. His film credits include Brian Rogers' *Screamers*, Amy Jenkins' *Instruction on Parting*, Jacque Menasche's *Cathy at War*, *F8* and *Be There*, the PBS documentary *The Narcotic Farm*, Ian Olds' *Occupation: Dreamland*, and *The Fixer*.