

Sooner or Later

A Film by
JÜRIG NEUENSCHWANDER



Director of Photography Philippe Cordey Sound Engineer Ingrid Städeli Film Editor Regina Bärtschi Music composed by David Gattiker
Sound Design Peter von Siebenthal Consultants Loten Dahortsang, Adrian Linder, Manuel Schüpfer, Anna Fanzun, Nicolas Broccard
Executive Producer Theres Scherer-Kollbrunner Production CARAC Film AG, Container Film AG Distribution Filmcoopi Zürich AG

Co-Producers SF DRS, ARTE Switzerland, ARTE G.E.I.E., TELECLUB AG

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www.soonerorlater.ch

The new Swiss documentary about evanescence, dying, death and grief, despair, anger, pain, helplessness, release and calm.

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A film by Jürg Neuenschwander

With the dying, I started.
With the bereaved I finished.
All knew that we would never see the film together.

90 minutes, 35mm, color, 1 : 1.85, Dolby SRD EX,
English subtitles,
Switzerland, Tibet, 2003

Production

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a film by Jürg Neuenschwander

The Swiss documentary filmmaker Jürg Neuenschwander touches a taboo: dying. **sooner or later** shows people, dying people, their fears, despair, pain and helplessness. And it shows the family member who accompany the dying in their last days, who are thus confronted with their own fears and helplessness.

The dying, who agreed to a camera team filming their death are no longer with us. They will not see the film. But they wanted other people to see it, to show publicly the face of dying and withering away. Neuenschwander shows us seven examples of dying, here in the Emmenthal and far away in Tibet.

An old woman dies alone; an old man gets married shortly before his death; a 40-year old man fights his cancer doggedly; a 16-year old, also terminally ill, suffers extreme physical changes, and - this also exists - a baby lives for just half an hour.

sooner or later shows also the business of the funeral homes, the daily routine of the gravedigger, the work in the crematorium. The film observes discreetly, but precisely and insistently. Sometimes it is close to the person, sometimes farther away. Respect for people is the leitmotiv of the film.

sooner or later

A film by Jürg Neuenschwander

Sooner or later the time comes. Sooner or later it happens to all of us. Sooner or later it gets you. Not only in religion, but also in literature and in the still young history of film making, it is omnipresent. Maybe even more than love, its so closely connected counterpart.

Death has fascinated at all times. Though feared, when it happened it was accepted. It was allowed to happen because it was most of the time fast and painless. Romeo takes poison, Carmen is stabbed, the Lady of the Camellias dies of consumption, but also in a timely manner. Intellectual history tells us many things, true things, about love. But we are told very little about death.

It doesn't tell us about dying, about the time before death. The «survivors», the mourners are noticed only after the death of a friend or family member. The time before death, the time of dying, of withering away remains out of focus. It does not exist from a dramatic point of view.

Feature films show death, the moment of death. The closing of the eyes, or the opening of the hand is the conventional way of showing the moment when death occurs. At the outside it may show the death throes while the dying utters important words. Or the soprano sings an especially beautiful aria.

Dying and Survivors

The documentary **sooner or later** is interested in the in the period that the intellectual history leaves out. It shows the human being before he/she dies, and the friends and family before their fellow human being leaves them behind.

Jürg Neuenschwander shows people like you and me, actual people in today's world. But they have reached the end of their lives, be they young, in their prime, old, or on their death-bed. Contrary to the heroes in novels or films, pathos is alien to them. In their last days and hours they falls silent and close their eyes. They die in silence and, only too often, they die alone.

«With the dying I started; with the bereaved I ended». This is how **sooner or later** begins. It is about both, those who will die and those who will stay behind. They both get a chance to speak, those who are still alive but know that they are dying and those who accompany them on these, their last days.

The people in the film agreed to be accompanied by a camera during their last days, as have their families. Five people, whose days were recorded in **sooner or later**, are now dead. They will not see the film. But they knew that other people would see it, and that is also what they wanted.

Emmenthal and Tibet

At the beginning, an old woman dies; at the end an old man dies; both, from so-called natural causes. Two other persons, a 16-year old adolescent and a 40-year old man are confronted with a cancer diagnosis. The teenager and his parents have one more year together; the man and his wife have six months. The twins, David and Noah were stillborn, and baby Levin lived only for a short time after his birth. Also in Tibet, the other world, a man dies, a husband and father.

They appear sometimes oddly alike these different and separate worlds: the idyllic cemetery, nestled in our familiar hilly landscape of the Emmenthal, and the trees with prayer flags at the last resting places on Tibet's arid plateaus. In death, they are the same. In Tibet, the bodies are thrown into the river to feed the fish. In the Emmenthal they are buried six feet under, dust to dust. A ritual ceremony in far-way Asia, a mundane job for the funeral homes and gravediggers here.

Jürg Neuenschwander knows both worlds: his Emmenthal, where he grew up and where he shot the movie «The Power of Healing» about the local healers, as well as Tibet, where he travelled extensively and where the film «Shigatse» about the local medicine was developed.

In **sooner or later**, there is no room for doctors. When death is involved, they fade into the background. In our culture, family, friends, and the hospice nurse take their place; in Tibet, the monks take part in the grieving rituals and thus help the bereaved.

Pain and Emotions

Sooner or later is a pure documentary. It observes, nothing else: precisely, intensively, directly. Jürg Neuenschwander does not stage anything, nor does he give any directions. He lets it happen. But his film is always about the human being, his grief, his anger, his fear, and his helplessness; it is about the emotions of the dying and of the survivor. Philippe Cordey's camera moves carefully, discreetly. Sometimes it is close to the person, and then it moves away. Respect is its leitmotiv.

David Gattiker's music respects the mood of the film. It is clear and transparent, and sometimes sounds as if wanting to express the silence. Regina Bärtschi's editing, even though not linear, takes its time, works with long, quiet sequences and concentrates on the essentials. She focuses on the human being, his feeling, his breathing, until the film becomes a painful, but also a liberating whole.

Death is spectacular in itself. The film shows this too. Death shakes us up and about. Everything else becomes unimportant. One cannot avoid the emotions when facing death. This happens also in **sooner or later**. The movie is upsetting; probably more than one would like to admit. There is no need for any artificial dramatic build-up - it happens all by itself.

Those who have ever lost a dear one, accompanied him, even if only from afar, on his journey through dying, will not be able to withdraw from **sooner or later**. The film forces us not to turn away, but to face death, grief, and pain, even other people's pain. But the film also allows us to take a look at the unpleasantness, the repressed truths. **Sooner or later** takes away the shame that would normally forbid us to take a closer look.

Jürg Neuenschwander Swiss Filmmakers Association (SFA)

Born 1953 in Signau, Emmental in Switzerland. Education in Signau and Berne, Filmdirector, Mediaproducer; Head of the MediaLab, University for the Arts Berne; Scholarship from the Bernese Commission of Photo, Film and Video; Cristallo di Locarno; Founder of Container TV, Film and Television Productions Inc., (1978); Media Consultant; Director of Short- and Feature Films, Art-Projects and Multimedia Installations.

Films (Excerpt):

Waterline	(in progress)
SOONER OR LATER, 90	35mm, 2000-2003
Encounters on the Milky Way, 94'	35mm, 1998-2000
The Power of Healing, 90'	35mm, 1994-1995
Shigatse, 94'	16mm, 1989-1990
My mother is in Sri Lanka, 90'	16mm, 1984, 1985

Short films (Excerpt)

Africa Swiss Cup	(in progress)
Q in Sahel	(in production)
Freiheitsentzug, 45'	DigiBeta, 1996-1997
Hey you!, 16'	DigiBeta, 1998
The Promise, 24'	DigiBeta, 1996
The Magic of Simulation, 25'	DigiBeta, 1995-1996
Raschida, 35'	DigiSP, 1993-1994
Konfrontation Aids, Serie in 6 parts	BetaSP, 1991-1993
Seeing means Living, 27'	BetaSP, 1991
Fri-Art NY- Made in Switzerland, 42'	3/4 inch, 1984
On the mountain - auf dem Berg, 6'	3/4 inch, 1993
So Bern - Youth on the Street, 20'	1/2 inch, b/w, 1980

Installations and Art-Projects (Excerpt)

ZONES, interactive, 4-channel video installation	1999-2002
Schein, interactive video installation Bern	1998
The Presidents, video installation and performances	1984
ColorTV, installation	1982
Passagen, multimedia installation	1980

OUTLET, Head of art exchange project between the Academy of Fine Arts, Munich, and the University for the Arts Berne	2000-2001
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Production Crew

Directed by
Assistant Director Tibet
Consultant

Director of Photography
Sound Engineer
Film Editor
Music composed by
Sound Design
Filmscript by

Musicians

Production Manager
Set Coordinator
Productions Secretaries

Executive Producer
Co-Producer
Assistant Technicians

Music Recording
Sound Mixing
Color Matching

Graphic Design

Titles
Production Equipment and
AVID Postproduction Studio
Tape to Film Transfer
Laboratory
Sound Studio

Distribution Switzerland
Worldsales

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Adrian Linder
Alex Sutter
Martin Weber
Philippe Cordey
Ingrid Städeli
Regina Bärtschi
David Gattiker
Peter von Siebenthal
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and Nicolas Broccard
David Gattiker
Rick Iannacone
Hans Ulrich Grütter
Theres Scherer-Kollbrunner
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Benoit Piccand
Hans Küenzi
Patrick Lindenmaier
Charly Huser
Peter Auchli
Christoph Stähli
Carlo Piaget

Container TV AG
Cinépix
Schwarz Film AG
Sound Design Studios AG
Zone 33
Filmcoopi Zürich AG
Container TV AG

Collection of quotations

Alfred Lüthi

Water, water, water, water.
I hope there isn't any.
It hasn't rained for quite a while.
It did once seep through
when we dug as deep as this.
It's because of the clay,
the clay, the clay.
I can't have people saying
you drown down there
on your last day.

Samuel Sahli

I kept expecting the call in the
morning. Whenever the phone
rang
I thought, «Now this is it.»

Markus Sahli

Strenuous, sometimes.
But it's ... it makes you feel good.
You realize you're doing
something with your body.
That's what feels good.

Priest Plasch Spescha

David and Noah, you have had
to leave this world before
really having arrived.

Lama Yeshe

The flags remind you of the dead.
Everybody who passes here
thinks of the transitoriness of life.
And that he, too, will one day
be brought here and recites
OM MANE PADME HUM.

Beat Feyer

You realize it all the more later on,
also that you were so understand-
ing, especially during the situation
when there was such a drastic
change.
For ten minutes all was going well,
and from one minute to the next
a world just collapsed.
You just get hit over the head
with a hammer and have to try to
find a way out.

Peter Kauer

I want to be taken seriously when
I say I may not reach the age of 40,
or I don't think of my birthday.
I don't want people to say,
«There are miracles.» Or, «I've heard
of a wonder doctor who's done
goodness knows what.» When I say,
«I'm in a bad way, I'd like to die,
I can't go on anymore,»
then I don't want to be told fairy
tales.

Mathilde und Eric Roquier-Fischer

Now you give Mrs. Fischer your
hand, Mr Roquier. Now I'd like to
ask you to Answer my question one
at a time.

Now I'd like to ask you if you will
take Mrs Mathilde Fischer to be
your wife.

Please answer with yes.

Do you want to marry me?

Yes ... Yes, yes, Eric.

Do you want to marry Mrs Fischer?

Then you also have to answer with
yes.

Eric, do you want to marry me?

Yes.

Peter Kauer

But dying itself frightens me more or
less ... it really frightens me.
I really am frightened.

Eveline Sahli

Markus said every evening,

«What will be new tomorrow?»

The double vision kept getting
worse, not only looking into the dis-
tance but also at close range. Then
his foot became numb, then his
leg up to the knee, then the leg up
to the hip, then it started with the
hand, up to the elbow, up to the
shoulder, suddenly the whole right
side, he could no longer control his
movements. Then it continued with
the left side of his face.

He had no feeling at all anymore.

He had difficulties with eating, too.

Regula Seiler und Eric Roquier-Fischer

Mr Roquier, what does that feel like?

Bad.

Bad? What could I do to improve it?

Nothing.

Monk Doga

The person who has died does not realize at first that he has died. He keeps returning to his family. For about three days he looks to see if his wife or his mother have put food on his plate. He tries to talk to them. Eventually he realizes that he has died and he feels very lonely.

Jacqueline Trüssel und Peter Kauer

Is this OK?

I don't know.

What?

Put it on. Put it on.

Go now. You don't have to tell me what to do.

May I help you, Peter?

No.

Loda

The monks helped him to die and to prepare for death.

After three days we committed his body to the river.

Kerstin Stock

There was always still a bit of hope.

Yes, until the end, when ...

I thought, see him once more ...when the drip was shut off.

I saw, when it was decided, it changed once more.

Tsultim

The monks gather up there and perform the Cho death ritual. At one part during the death ritual the lama says, «Put the body in the water!»

We bring the body here and lay it

down here.

Then I cut here and here and then here.

Then the other arm, then the neck, then the leg, the other leg. Then I open the stomach, then the back, then I take the heart out and look at it.

Then I take the liver out and examine it, whether they are both good for the fish.

When I have dissected everything, I put the knife down. The lama says,

«Throw the parts into the water!»

Then I take the right arm and throw it into the water. Then I take the other parts and throw them into the river.

Ason Ramadani

Like doing it? No, I don't like doing it but somebody has to do it. If a grave has to be dug, somebody has to go in and open it up. If you had to dig every day, that would be difficult, but here we don't have to dig every day.

It doesn't happen so often. In Kosovo, during the war, I had to dig a lot. We dug many graves ourselves. We found many people in the woods, on the land, hidden in cellars, then we got them out, dug a grave and put them in. For almost two months I did only that with a group of others.

Kerstin Stock und André Zorn

Do you want to hold him?

For the photo? You can if you want. I don't mind.

We wanted to ask you for that anyway.

The family photo.

That's right.

sooner or later

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**With the dying, I started.
With the bereaved
I finished
All knew that we would
never see the film
together.**

In Memory of

Radmila Kusic

David and Noah

Dorje

Peter Kauer

Levin

Markus Sahli

Eric Roquier-Fischer

My gratitude to the bereaved

Jolanda Leu, Dragoslava Tomovic, Véronique Kaeher and Ludovic, Beat Feyer, Dokar and Loda, Jacqueline Trüssel, Hans and Berta Kauer, Christian Kauer, Familie Niklaus and Jocelyn Kauer, Familie Hans-Ulrich and Marlene Kauer-Gygli, Familie Verena and Anton Kessler-Kauer, Kerstin Stock and André Zorn, Familie Eveline and Samuel Sahli, Mathilde Fischer Roquier

Jürg Neuenschwander

The new Swiss film about evanescence, dying, death and grief, despair, anger, pain, helplessness, release and calm.

Sooner or Later

A Film by Jürg Neuenschwander



sooner or later, a new film by Jürg Neuenschwander (The Power of Healing, Encounters on the Milky Way), dwells patiently on dying and grieving; on parents with their son, who died a few hours after his birth; on an old man getting married shortly before his death; on a teenager losing his body and finally his life; on a young man rebelling against his death; on family members awakening from their numbness, laughing and crying; on a gardener in the cemetery carefully arranging flowers; on the small peephole through which one can see the furnace in the crematorium; on the tomb, where the gravediggers shovel dirt on the coffin.

sooner or later captures ordinary acts, which in the face of death become a ritual, and gives space to the subtle, nearly invisible gestures and movements which make the suffering and insecurities more bearable: caressing a cat, a handshake or a fleeting glance; pictures and moments in death and grief, which we avoid in everyday life, feeling insecure, fearful or ashamed.

sooner or later does not deal with hope for eternal life, but with the search for the nearly invisible stops on the way to death and through the grieving process. It is not about escaping, but about watching and examining one's own mortality.

sooner or later tells about the universality of the only certitude in human life. Whether in the Emmental or in Tibet, whether at home or in a hospital, the final farewell to persons and to life is a difficult and painful experience everywhere. But there is no escape from one's own transience anywhere.

90 minutes, 35mm, color, English subtitles,
Switzerland, Tibet, 2003

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Director of Photography	Philippe Cordey
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Liebefeld, 4th of August 2003

Dying - sooner or later

Presentation to the Media on July 28, 2003 / Introductory Remarks by T. Hess

Dying concerns us all - you and me - **sooner or later**.
I hope - for you, for myself, and of course also for the film - hopefully later.

I have been practicing acute medicine for 30 years, the last 20 years at the Inselspital in Bern in the ward for acute internal medicine with 80 beds.

Every year, we lost between 120 and 150 patients

- Sometimes suddenly, abruptly and unexpectedly
- Sometimes expectedly, perhaps even longed for
- Sometimes, late, due to false hope for cure or over-treatment

The dying were old and young, acute or chronically sick, fathers, mothers, children, persons living alone or abandoned.

They all died in their own way, no one exactly in the same as the other one.

There, I was confronted, practically on a daily basis, with dying and dying people, and I should therefore be able to give you a **clear concept, thesis, even a recipe** on how to handle dying, on how to handle the film.

I have to disappoint you.

There is no valid general recipe for dying or for the interaction with the dying, even though many believe and sometimes even claim to have such a recipe.

Already the **definition of dying** is not very clear and rather difficult - contrary to **death**.

Clinical death with loss of consciousness, lack of breathing and stopped circulation, which under favorable circumstances might be reversible for a few minutes, and **biological death**, with irreversible brain damage accompanying death, are reasonably clearly defined, medically and legally.

Not so dying.

It is agreed that dying is last phase in life and inevitably leads to death.

But, when and how does dying begin? - How do we recognize a dying person? When is somebody dying?

The **Swiss Academy for Medical Science** wrote a definition of the dying in the «Guidelines for the medical care of dying patients». It must have been very difficult to write, because the definition is rather vague.

I quote:

«A person is considered to be dying, when the physician, based on clinical symptoms, comes to the conclusion that the illness, or the traumatic damage is irreversible and will lead in spite of any treatment and within the foreseeable future - within the foreseeable future - to death.» Voilà...!

But **when** is the future death foreseeable?

Watch the film very carefully to see if you can find an answer, images, indications or even a message from the afflicted! The critically ill often communicate when dying begins for them: with hints - instructions - wishes - refusal of therapy - checking out from and sometimes also checking into the hospital.

Dying has many facets; there is no typical way of dying.

Dying is individual; there is no pattern. It lasts a few seconds with a heart attack, minutes or hours with a severe pulmonary embolism, hours or days with an acute untreatable infection, and sometimes a little longer with slowly advancing chronic illnesses.

Nobody dies the in same way; all die in their own way.

I have experienced the dying of many people, also people from different cultures. I have always been impressed, often also depressed. There is always the question whether one has

done what was right and important for the affected person. There is no definite answer to this question.

And now a little **advice** about dying in our culture: Think about it - don't avoid the dying, they will feel excluded - don't look away when it happens, stay, if you can.

My motivation for being here is that somebody in Switzerland has taken the trouble to make **a film about the subject of dying.**

I hope that this film and its subject will become interesting and important for a broader public.

I hope that it will become a starting point for a long overdue **objective discussion on the subject of dying**, a discussion without superior attitudes, since the ultimate truth about dying is, by definition, hidden in death itself.

I also hope that the debate about the film and its subject leads to results; results, which will be of advantage to you and me - since we are all mortal - and preferably sooner than later!

Tino Hess

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