



The Possibilities are Endless Discussion Guide

Directors: James Hall, Edward Lovelace
Year: 2014
Time: 83 min

You might know these directors from:
Werewolves Across America (2010)

FILM SUMMARY

The brain is the organ that controls identity and purpose, serving as a gauge for fluctuations in emotions, sensations, and understandings. The brain tells us to put one foot in front of the other, constructs feelings into comprehensible sounds, and keeps us functioning. In February 2005, Edwyn Collins' brain suffered two hemorrhages following a stroke. Suddenly, the world as he had known it was incomprehensible.

Frontman of Scottish post-punk act, Orange Juice, and composer of global hit, "A Girl Like You," Collins was a strong, driven character, certain of his purpose and desire to create music. But in the months following his stroke, the once vibrant pop star was left with a host of physical disabilities and a mere four phrases that he repeated over and over: "yes," "no," "Grace Maxwell" (his wife's name), and "the possibilities are endless."

THE POSSIBILITIES ARE ENDLESS offers an atmospheric rendering of Collins' and Maxwell's struggle to put the pieces of life back together. A solitary tree bending in a fog-swept field, the ripple of water on a wide beach, a herd of cows lazing in the mud, a gray sky settling on London rooftops ... slow, deliberate, natural imagery allows us to contemplate the confusion caused by losing one's faculties, and the terrifying road to recovery. Beyond Collins' journey, the film contemplates the miraculous power of love between two people. Complete with a sparse, moody soundtrack composed by Collins himself, this gorgeous filmic ride takes a slow road to understanding, reminding us that, with love, the possibilities truly are endless.

FILM THEMES

Following a stroke, one man becomes distressingly altered. All that remains are questions and nebulous confusion. What is memory and identity? How will I find my way back? Love proves to be the guiding light.

MEMORY AND IDENTITY

As Edwyn Collins struggled to reconstruct some semblance of a functioning life after his stroke, he faced the ultimate dilemma: “I’m struggling to come to terms with who I am.” With so many past memories eroded, the notion of self and personal identity was profoundly challenged. What are we comprised of? Are we the sum of what we have experienced, or is there something greater and deeper at work? As fragments of his previous life re-surface, we encounter a man intent on leaving the past behind, determined to create a life from what he sees before him.

HUMAN REFLECTIONS IN THE NATURAL LANDSCAPE

The sense of place and importance of nature is significantly captured with wide-open expanses shown in the film from Helmsdale, a town in the north of Scotland where Edwyn Collins’ family have lived for many years. There is a juxtaposition between the representation of human nature and of nature itself; water ebbs and flows mirroring life cycles; storms brew mirroring a sense of foreboding. By capturing the silent, wordless contours of nature, filmmakers Lovelace and Hall draw parallels of individual struggles in the mountains, valleys, fields, and coastlines.

HUMILITY

When the focused and decisive Edwyn Collins experienced a stroke, his way of life no longer worked. The computations didn’t add up. As a 45-year-old man, he learned to read, write, speak, sing, and walk all over again. The road back to himself was treacherous, with signposts provided only by his wife. “I’m a little bit frightened with the world. It’s too much. It’s too difficult for me,” he admits at one point. The process of attaining logic and understanding required an enormous amount of humility and faith when he could not see the road ahead.

LOVE, THE GUIDING LIGHT

THE POSSIBILITIES ARE ENDLESS is undeniably romantic. Devoid of manufactured clichés about love, Grace Maxwell illustrates the power of devotion and companionship; she is a partner that remains loyal in sickness and health, in good and bad, through thick and thin. It is possible that Collins would not have regained his footing or returned to the stage without Maxwell’s guiding light. In THE POSSIBILITIES ARE ENDLESS, the meaning and capacity of love becomes tangible and true.

“I want to get on with life. Looking back is nostalgic. I want to get on with what possibilities are ahead of me. Looking back is not for me. Looking forward is the way.”

Edwyn Collins

“Grace helped me a lot through the dark days. She set me free.”

Edwyn Collins

FILM FACTS:

- Directors Lovelace and Hall approached Edwyn Collins and Grace Maxwell to discuss making a film after listening to Collins' 2010 album "Losing Sleep." Both directors are long-time fans of Orange Juice and of Collins' music in general.
- After running an errand on a Sunday afternoon in 2005, Maxwell returned home to find Collins collapsed on the floor, having suffered a stroke at the age of 45 due to high blood pressure. Collins was rushed to hospital, and after six days, he fell into a coma. Upon awakening from the coma, it became clear that he was suffering from acute aphasia, a condition affecting the brain and causing problems with language usage. Collins was hospitalized for 6 months.
- "A Girl Like You," the 1995 single written by Edwyn Collins and released on his album "Gorgeous George", was an international hit and paid for Collins' and Maxwell's London home. Two separate music videos were made for the single - a U.S. and an international version.
- The "actor" playing a younger Edwyn Collins' in THE POSSIBILITIES ARE ENDLESS is William Collins, Ed and Grace's 23-year-old son. When his father first suffered the stroke, Will had not been very interested in his father's talents, but as Collins recovered and William started his own band, he began to appreciate his father's music.
- The film's entire instrumental original score was written by Edwyn Collins, Carwyn Ellis and Sebastian Lewsley.
- 15 million people worldwide suffer a stroke each year, with 6 million deaths and 5 million individuals left with permanent disabilities from loss of vision and/or speech to paralysis and confusion. Globally, stroke is the 2nd leading cause of death for people over the age of 60, and the 5th leading cause of death for those between ages 15 and 59. The most common cause of stroke is high blood pressure.
- Edwyn Collins' band, Nu-Sonic, formed in Glasgow, Scotland in 1976, changed its name to Orange Juice in 1979. Collins remained a member until it disbanded in 1985. He then embarked on a solo career, and in 1994, he built his own recording studio in West Hampstead, London, where he recorded his 3rd solo album, which included the global hit, "A Girl Like You."
- After his stroke, Collins could only say the following words: yes, no, Grace Maxwell, and the possibilities are endless.
- 87% of strokes are ischemic, when a blood vessel in the brain develops a clot, cutting off blood supply. 13% are hemorrhagic, when a weakened vessel ruptures and bleeds into the brain.
- When a stroke occurs, nerve cells in the brain that control functions such as memory, speech, and movement become injured. Nerve cells on the right side of the brain affect the left side of the body and vice versa, explaining why a stroke on one side of the brain can be visually seen on the opposite side of the body.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. Share this film. Give others the chance to be touched and inspired by it.
2. Become involved with [Power To End Stroke](#), founded by the [American Stroke Association](#).
3. Educate yourself on factors that can prevent stroke from affecting your life. [The National Stroke Association](#) provides a list of the leading lifestyle risk factors, including smoking, alcohol use, and obesity.
4. Read "Falling and Laughing: The Restoration of Edwyn Collins", written by Grace Maxwell.

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Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.