



It would be easy, perhaps, for a film to downplay the effect of illness upon both the sufferer and their loved ones. With *Salt in My Soul*, director Will Battersby dodges this impulse by virtue of having made a documentary about a person who confronted the effects of her illness, as well as the death that, at a certain point in the disease's trajectory, seemed to be the inevitable end point.

One might remember the story of the young woman who survived a transplant involving both lungs, only to succumb to the illness that required such a drastic solution just more than a month later. That woman was Mallory Smith, whose story became national news in October 2017 but had already touched the lives of many through her resilience in the face of cystic fibrosis, the pervasive disease of the lungs as a result of mucus build-up that does not filter properly.

Fatal infection was always a possibility for Smith, but the real worry was that *B. cepacia*, bacteria that are common for those with healthy immune systems but deadly for CF patients, might find its way into her lungs. At a certain point in her life, it did, shortening her lifespan to just 25 at the time of her death in November 2017. Battersby's documentary is split evenly into two stories, which certainly narrows the creativity with which Smith's story has been approached. That matters little in the face of its subject, who narrates her own story from beyond the grave (presumably her thoughts via recordings made of diary entries found after her death) and presents such a matter-of-fact maturity beyond the years she lived on this earth.

We meet Smith herself through interviews and archival footage and that narration, and the portrait painted is of an individual, burdened with her own fragile mortality but still flourishing in the face of it. We also meet Smith's parents, Mark and Diane, each of whom tackled their daughter's illness with a mixture of optimism and pragmatism.

Mark details Mallory's early childhood struggles with the methods of assuaging the symptoms, such as hitting her very hard on the back in order to loosen the mucus better (Later on, a medical vest, designed to shake Mallory's torso, replaced this method but was no more comfortable). Diane talks of the proactive measures taken to keep Mallory social, in spite of the dangers of infection outside hospital rooms or her own childhood bedroom (One amusing detail is how Diane essentially made friends with fellow students on behalf of her daughter).

Despite her sickness, Mallory flourished in early adulthood, too, finding interests wherever she could – swimming always somehow made her symptoms go away while underwater – and eventually finding love with a young man who accepted her selflessly and completely. The qualities of Battersby's documentary are tied to the story being told here, rather than the method with which he has told that story. It's surprisingly affecting in the face of such limitations, so that, by the time *Salt in My Soul* reaches the end of Mallory's life, we've had as full a picture of that life as we possibly could. A particularly affecting montage ends the film, as figures in the subject's life read her own words to us and, most importantly, themselves, finding strength in the life their loved one lived.