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My Ithaka

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Publication Date

2018-02-12

My Ithaka

Producer/director: James Pace-Cornsilk

Abstract

My Ithaka is a 30-minute documentary about my journey to piece together the mystery of my father's life, and look at the difficult questions of responsibility and guilt that surround suicide. The film, driven by interviews, archival movies, and photographs, has a dream-like quality to it. Images are constructed using photographs and other physical objects to illustrate the stories in the interviews. My father committed suicide before I was born, when my mother was four months pregnant. I did not know this until I was 13 years old. Now 26, I am ready to have the difficult conversations about his life I have been too apprehensive to have. In learning about my father, I learn how suicide continues to affect the people around the deceased, making them question if they could have done more, should they have done more, and how today they manage guilt. In the end, I learn that, for me, this process has been about building personhood. I emerge from the journey much wiser than I began, and can now see my father and myself in a more informed manner.

Final Script

TRT: 24:42

VIDEO	AUDIO
Fade up driving shot of powerlines	Fade up highway sound
TEXT CARD: "Wise as you will have become, so full of experience, you will have understood by then what these Ithacas mean. - C.P. Cavafy"	Fade up Music "Circle and line"
Cut to Elliston place sign	
Cut to pool tables	
Cut to Gold Rush exterior	
Cut to slo mo shot of Broadway	
Cut to Nashville skyline at night	
Dip to black	
Fade up to shot from plane	VO: Every time I blew out a birthday candle as a child, I always wished for a father.

Dip to black	Growing up, I always thought my father died of a virus, because that's what my mother told me. It wasn't until I was 13 years old that she told me he killed himself when she was four months pregnant.
Fade up to setting up Carol interview	VO: When she told me this, of course I shocked, and maybe that's why it's taken me another 13 years to ever ask about him.
Cut to setting up Donna int	
Cut to setting up Dean int	
Cut to setting Robert and Marcia int	
Cut to Dean OS	James: Obviously you know this is the first time we're meeting, ever, in either of our lifetimes. But you were very close to my father.
Cut to Carol OS	James: Why do you think we haven't talked about him, almost, ever?
Cut to robert and marcia OS	James: Guys I mean we've never really talked about our father at all.
Fade to black	Fade out music "circle and line"
Fade up ext of Granny's house	Fade up sound of birds
Cut to back porch	Fade in sound of Maruth looking through DVDs
Cut to lower third over black "My Father's Adoptive sister, Maruth"	
Cut to Maruth looking through DVDs	
Cut to Maruth sitting at computer	Sound: clicking with mouse on computer
Cut to Nita behind Maruth	Maruth: Well I guess Walgreens didn't know what order these things were supposed to be

	in.
Cut to old film on computer screen	Maruth: Oh there he is.
	James: Granny and Grandpa had him as a foster child for awhile?
	Maruth: Yes, for five years.
	Maruth: He was always a good kid.
Cut to black	
	Fade up sound of turning pages
Fade up title: "My Father's Adoptive Mother"	James: And what does it say in there about my dad?
Granny OS	Granny: The baby was soaking wet, and coal soot was embedded in its skin. Police said the baby was lying on the bed spring and beer cans were strewn all over the floor. The mother spent most of her time at a beer joint called Smitty's which was near the hut. One of the church members who owned a grocery store in Madison knew of the mother, who lived with her mother and uncle in a tar paper shack near the store. She had overheard the mother tell someone in the store that those mean old policemen had come and had taken her baby away.
Cut to archival film of father as baby	Music: Solo somber vibraphone
Cut to archival film of father in red jacket as a kid	Fade out music
Cut to Maruth OS	Maruth: I remember that we all had to go and meet with the judge. And so, we're riding in the van. Well Jimmy's crying the whole way. And we just said, what is wrong with him he's hurting our feelings here. We're taking him to adopt him. And so we went in and met with the judge and of course he was a real nice man. And he said so, he talked to all of us and he

	said so you're now part of the family. Your name is officially James Michael Pace. And so we all, and of course Jimmy quit crying. And we were going home and we said Jimmy, why were you crying? And he said, I thought y'all were giving me away.
Cut to archival of father playing on floor Cut to archival of father throwing a fit on couch	Maruth: And he had a bad temper as a baby. And he would hold his breath until he turned blue and just collapse and he'd go limp on the floor. And we'd go running to him and say poor Jimmy, what's wrong, what's wrong? And the doctor said, he's doing it for attention. So the next time he does it just step over him and go on about your business. And we did and he quit doing it.

Cut to archival of father next to lake	Music: Solo somber vibraphone
	James: Tell me about the time when you first met Jim Pace.
Cut to Donna OS	Donna: Sure, we were at band camp. We were both Sophmores.
Cut to black, fade in title: "My Father's Wife, Donna"	
Cut to photo of father at drums Curt to tight on face of father at drums	Donna: He was very shy. He was very sweet towards me. But I could tell, you just don't mess with him.
Cut to Barbara OS	Barbara: Me and him were closest because we were closest in age.
Cut to black, fade up title: "My Father's Adoptive Sister, Barbara"	
Cut to barbara OS Cut to father in bed with broken leg	Barbara: He had a temper later on it life, everyone walked on eggshells around him.
Cut to father in bed, tight on face	Barbara: I partied with him, I did. And I feel guilty because I felt like I was a part of his

	detriment.
Cut to shot out of car, looking forward	Fade out music
Cut to out of focus Gold Rush ext	Fade in traffic sound Fade in music: Lost radio “remember”
Cut to Robert and Marcia OS	James: I got the police report about a month ago from the cops. And what happened was, our father was at the Gold Rush
Cut to title “Donna’s Children, Robert and Marcia. (The First Time We’ve Spoken)”	
Cut to shot of Elliston sign Cut to shot of pool tables	James: He was at the Gold Rush drinking, I think he was on some drugs. He leaves and he meets this guy on the street, on Elliston.
Cut to shot of Gold Rush exterior	James: Our father him to get in his car and drive around and talk. They drive around talk. And I think in the car ride, driving around, is when my father says he has a shotgun in the trunk.
Cut to Elliston Place painting on wall Cut to driving shot out of car	James: They then drive to my mom’s apartment. He takes the shotgun out, loads it, and they walk inside.
Cut to driving shot of Sawyer Brown sign Cut to shot of walking up to house	James: And then I think it’s in the apartment, in my mom’s apartment over on Sawyer Brown, where he says to this Greg Woodard guy that I want you to have sex with me and then kill me.
Cut to Robert and Marcia OS	James: Next the story goes I think, Greg Woodard says I’m going to get a glass of water, and that’s when our father jumped in the bathtub and pulled the trigger.
Cut to driving shot up at powerlines	Fade out “remember” Fade in “circle and line”
Cut to photo of father with no shirt	

Cut to tight shot of father with no shirt	VO: When I first read the police report, the events surrounding that night and what my father apparently said to Greg Woodard sounded almost made up, too cliché. I tried to find Greg Woodard to ask him about it, but he wouldn't talk. That night at the Gold Rush happened about two years after my mother and father met working at the Nashville PBS station.
Cut to Carol OS	Carol: I moved to TN in February of 1987.
Cut to title over black "My Father's Girlfriend, Carol. My Mother"	
Cut to Carol OS	Carol: I was a producer director and he was a cameraperson.
Cut to Dean OS	Dean: When I think of your father I think of a craftsmen. He was very serious about his craft. He was very good at being a videographer.
	Dean: And the fact that he worked in side of a crew was good for him, because it would lighten him up some. I think he had some really dark moods.
Fade up title card over black: "My Father's Co-worker, Dean"	
	James: At work you could see these dark moods come out?
	Dean: Definitely.
Cut to Carol OS	James: Then what happened after you started to get together?
	Carol: Well you know there was the issue of the fact that he was still married with two

	children living with his wife.
	Robert: There was infidelity, ok. Our father left our mom to be with your mom.
Cut to tilt up on photo of mother and father on couch	Robert: She said we're not to speak to you or Carol.
Cut to tight shot of mother's face	Robert: Dad doesn't live here anymore he lives with this other woman. We hate this other woman. Ok, that's what we, ok, that's what you said mom so sure, yeah. That's what we're going to do.
	James: Did people know what was going on?
Cut to Dean OS	Dean: Definitely. It was a poorly kept secret. And it's the happiest I'd seen him. They had a great relationship. Well, I say great, I believe he was alcoholic.
Cut to photo of mother and father on couch in red shirt Cut to tight shot on father's face	Carol: So when we were on the Natchez Trace shoot, we didn't have any Jack Daniels with us. Also by that time I knew we had to have the Jack on hand, or else things were not going to be pretty. Again, I didn't know enough about alcoholism to know what was going on until we spent that night in the hotel room together and I essentially experience him going through DT's. Shaking, cold sweat.
Cut to Dean OS	James: What was he like when he was drinking?
	Dean: Really a happy drunk, for the most part.
Cut to photo of father at audio mixer Tight shot on father at audio mixer	Dean: He was a perfectionist. He had a very high standard, production wise, life wise.
Cut to family photo at picnic table	Dean: If life was not what he considered perfection,
Tight shot of mother and father from family photo	Dean: he got angry or depressed.

Cut to Dean OS	James: And so I guess the culture being his family, being TN, the south in the 80s...
Dean OS Cut to mother and father at picnic Cut to tight shot of father's face	Dean: And it wasn't just that. It wasn't just middle TN. The buckle on the bible belt. He grew up in a very fundamental Christian sect, and they truly are a sect, called the Churches of Christ. You really had to work at being good. And I think he had a lot of guilt and shame for some of his choices.
Shot of shame letter Tilt down on shame letter	Cut in music: Solo somber vibraphone VO: A few years ago, my mom came across a note my father had written while in treatment at Cumberland Heights. It says, "the reason I am shamed based is because I set unreasonable goals for myself, and when I don't make them, I feel inadequate and inferior. I also feel very vulnerable because of the fear of abandonment, so therefore it is hard to let someone love me intentionally so relationships are very shaky. Shame separates me from others and God because it's hard to accept that God will forgive me for all the things I have done."
	Fade out solo somber vibraphone
Cut to Barbara OS	Barbara: He was angry that she got pregnant, but that's of course nothing against you I mean because
	James: But describe that phone call for me that you just mentioned.
	Barbara: I don't want to.
	James: I think it's important for me to hear. I'm not going to take it wrong. I mean I'm already born and I'm doing fine...
	Barbara: I just kept telling him, Jimmy. I don't know if he was drunk when he was talking to

	me but he was saying he just wanted to kick her in the stomach.
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Cut to photo of mother and father in tuxedo	Fade in music: “Circle and Line”
Cut to mother and father holding hands	
Cut to tight shot of holding hands	Carol: He had been suicidal for who knows how long. I was at work, I think it was the August membership drive. In between breaks we were on the phone and he was probably drunk but he was talking about how much he hated himself and that he wasn’t any good and that he was just going to throw himself off of a bridge.
Cut to Carol OS	
Cut to shot of bridge	
Cut to Carol OS	
Cut to side shot of bridge	
Cut to Carol OS	Carol: And then the next week and then the next week at work. He pulls me into the big studio. He says can I talk to you. And we sit down on the TN outdoorsman set.
Cut to water dropping into bathtub	Fade in sound of water dripping
Cut to Carol OS	Carol: And he tells me about how he had attempted to electrocute himself that weekend.
Cut to shot of water dripping into bathtub	Fade out sound of water dripping
Cut to Dean OS	James: Did you know that my father actually tried to kill himself before he actually did?
	Dean: No I did not know that.
	James: Sometime in mid June...

	Dean: Wait a minute, I did know that. That’s right, he tried to electrocute himself.
	James: Did he tell you?
	Dean: Yeah. I had forgotten that.

	James: Did he tell you at work?
	Dean: He must have. He must have, yeah. Your dad asked me to, we had a picnic table behind channel 8. He asked me to meet him back there. He was extremely despondent. And I think this was after he'd relapsed. I know it was after he'd relapsed. He had told me he had tried to electrocute himself and he had taped off the breakers.
	James: What did you think about that?
	Dean: James, I didn't know what to think. Unfortunately I was not equipped to deal.
Cut to photo of father in tuxedo`	Cut to music: Solo somber vibraphone
	James: Why do you think he told you? Because he also told my mom.
	Dean: I believe he told me because I think he could confide in me and knew I wouldn't share that. And in hindsight, I should've been telling a lot of people. Fade out Solo Somber Vibraphone
Cut to Carol OS	Carol: It had been coming up on my 40th birthday and I was supposed to be flying to Houston because my mom had invited me to come and have my birthday with them and paid for the ticket and everything. And he wasn't very happy about that because he felt like he was in a touchy point of his recovery and with that suicide attempt having happened just a couple of weeks earlier he felt that he kind of needed me to be there, to not leave. But again, right or wrong, I was following my Elenon teachings that I needed to do what I needed to do for me. Fade in music: Circle and Line

Cut to shot of phone cord Cut to dolly left across phone	Carol: And finally Saturday my curiosity got the better of me and Saturday morning I got ahold of him.
Cut to shaky driving shot Cut to Carol OS	Carol: And I'm not sure how the subject came up, but he had told me he bought the gun and had popeye help him put it together.
Cut to Donna	James: But you knew that weekend he was thinking about...

	Donna: Only because your mother had called.
Cut to Elliston and Louise sign Cut to dolly left on phone on smaller table	Donna: Somehow the police were called. And they wanted me to come out there. And I said I don't know where that is. And I didn't. I didn't know the part of town. And I said I don't know where that is, and I'm afraid to come out there.
	James: Why were you afraid?
Cut to move in on receiver	Donna: I was afraid he'd shoot me too.
Cut to Carol OS Cut to rotate around phone 1	Carol: So, then, I don't think I slept a lot that night. And I called him the next morning about ten or 10:30. And he was making breakfast. And he sounded good.
Cut to shaky Gold Rush exterior Cut to reflection of phone in window Cut to move out from phone 1 Cut to move in on receiver of phone 1 Cut to Carol OS	Carol: I was flying back to Nashville on Monday and he said so do you want me to pick you up? And I said well if you're feeling up for it, yeah. And we had planned to talk later to get the particulars down. And so he called me again around 3:30 in the afternoon. And kind of sounded angry. And kind of barked at me and said well, so, do you want me to come pick you up or what? And I said well, have you taken the gun back? No? And I said well as long as you're in possession of that gun I don't think it's a good idea to come and pick me up. So if you take the gun back, call me back. He didn't call back.

	Fade out Circle and Line
Fade up archival of father at Christmas	Cut in music: Solo Somber Vibraphone
Cut to Carol OS	Carol: So I brought something for you to read, I don't know if you want to get your camera back going to read it.
	James: Umm, I can maybe just...
	Carol: You want to come sit over here? I just have it right here. So this is the note he left that the police gave me.
	James: I thought the cops had destroyed it.
	Carol: Nope, they said this looks like it belongs to you, so you can have it.
	James: Ok, well, I'll try to get through this.
	Carol: Do you want me to read it to you?
	James: Umm, maybe. I don't know if I'll be able to get through it. It says, oh my god, this is it. I'm scared to death of life, I just can't handle it. Oh my god this it. Carol I love you so much and yet I did and said those things to you. I'm really insane and crazy, I must be. Carol have a long and happy life, you really know how to enjoy life. I don't. I love you so much Carol, that's why I think this is the best thing to do. I believe this is the only way I can leave you alone, and let you live your life the way you want to. Carol please don't let this affect your life and hurt your thinking in any way. Just remember that this is one of the things that you cannot change and go on with the wonderful life God has planned for you. I truly believe that what I did is God's will. Carol I hope you are rewarded in triplicate for what you tried to do for me. I'm sorry I wasted all that time and

	energy you gave me. I only hope that you've learned a lot about the disease, and the kind of person that has the disease. Carol, oh my Carolyn. That's not your full name. Carolyn. I'll miss you so much. Carol please don't determinate the pregnancy. Oh, don't determinate. Don't terminate the pregnancy. Carol please don't terminate the pregnancy unless it has something bad wrong with it. And if it is a boy please give him one of my names, either James, or Michael or Jimmy or Jim. Maybe he won't be as sick as I am. Carol I hope you find a good and well-balanced loving man to be the father of our child. Just be yourself, and you'll remember that you don't need to please anyone but yourself.
	Carol: He loved you honey, he'd love to meet you. It's just so sad that he didn't get the kind of help he needed in time. Fade in music: "A mother's love"
Cut to tilt down on suicide letter	
Cut to Carol OS	
Cut to Donna OS	
Cut to Barbara OS	
Cut to Dean OS	
Cut to timelapse of Broadway Cut to shot of me in front of Gold Rush Cut to shot of me looking at Gold Rush	VO: I recently discovered this poem, and a few lines stick out to me. They say: Ithaca gave you the marvelous journey. Without her you would not have set out. She has nothing left to give you now. And if you find her poor, Ithaca won't have fooled you. Wise as you will have become, so full of experience, you will have understood by then what these Ithacas mean.

Cut too drone shot of Nashville skyline	Fade up music: “Come on Back to Nashville”
Credits	

Source List

Carol Cornsilk
 Dean Dragonetti
 Robert Pace
 Marcia Floyd
 Donna Pace
 Maruth Hall
 Barbara Denisco
 Wilma Jean Pace