

THE PROGRESS OF HAPPINESS

A young man from Manchester comes to the industrial provinces of former East Germany. He is looking for something that eluded his grandfather in the War. It will elude him too, but instead, his search will turn up images of a collective past, fixed in home movies and videos. The young man stays and won't make it back to England for Christmas.

The film begins as a personal testimony, with letters to the grandfather, but soon becomes the story behind the history of Zschornowitz power station - once the biggest coal-fired plant in the world. In its day, no-one gave the power station too much thought. It was what their lives revolved around; it was their home. Thousands worked there, turning coal into electricity. The plant and its workers, the workers and their plant. Time stood still. But with the collapse of East Germany and the arrival of a market economy, their work was gone. They weren't needed any more. At the same time, the home movies those workers had shot were consigned to the cellar, junk people couldn't quite bring themselves to throw away for good.

What remains? The furnaces were out. The fire is gone. The power station was demolished. The end of an era. Life goes on.

We see visions of a lost country, beyond propaganda. Images that were production of the masses. With a very German sense of detail, the amateur film-makers document their reality. The coal goes in the heater and the chimney starts to smoke. A day's work is never done. The world would be a more just, more ordered place. No-one would have more than the rest, no-one less.

We see a particular mentality described. People longing for the warmth of the community. The smaller, private joys beside the promise of a new world that was never made good. The slower pace of things. The Socialist pulse of time. The fairytale of progress, happiness and faith.

Working with these images shot by the workers, the film conjures visions of a past erased and an absent future. A record of hope and loss. It sets about reawakening the magical moments of this proletarian culture, condensing them through association and ellipsis. How was it, really? An archaeology of life there, then and now.

The Progress of Happiness tells us of the dream everyone was going to dream together. We consider that dream worth retelling today.

(Martin Otting)

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COAL SONG

Dedicated to the children of our nurseries
by Willi Rosenheinrich, coal-miner

Good morning, dear heater, we're ever so cold,
So burn please, dear heater, won't you warm our toes?
But I'm cold too, I haven't any coal.
Ask the digger if he's got some, in the valley in the snow.
Ask the digger if he's got some, in the valley in the snow.

Good morning, dear digger, in the valley in the snow,
Can we have some coal please, for the heater and our toes?
But I don't have any, in my scoops there's no coal.
Ask the earth if she's got some, in the mines dug from stone.
Ask the earth if she's got some, in the mines dug from stone.

Good morning, dear earth, in the mines dug from stone,
Can we have some coal please, for the digger is all cold?
Help yourself, says the earth, dig, dig some more.
Light coal in your heater, soon you'll be warm.
Light coal in your heater, soon you will be warm.

TECHNICAL NOTES

Running time	68 min
Shooting formats	Super 8, N8, 16mm, 35mm, Video 8, VHS, Mini-DV
End format	Digibeta PAL, DVD-Video Colour and black & white
Aspect ratio	1:1.33
	English and German with English subtitles

A film by	Chris Wright and Stefan Kolbe
Camera and Production	Stefan Kolbe
Editing and Sound	Chris Wright
Re-recording and Mix	Rainer Schwarte
Advisers	Thomas Heise and Martin Otting

The Progress of Happiness is a graduation film. It is a co-production between Stefan Kolbe and the film school Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen Konrad Wolf. It was funded with a grant from Saxony-Anhalt State Film Board.

BIOGRAPHIES

Chris Wright was born in 1972 in Radcliffe, England. He studied German and French in Cambridge and Leipzig, before working as a translator. He then studied film editing at the Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen Konrad Wolf.

Stefan Kolbe was born 1972 in Halle, East Germany. He worked as a journalist and photographer for various newspapers before studying as a cameraman at the Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen Konrad Wolf.

PREVIOUS FILMS TOGETHER

BREAD & PICKLE (1997) with Robert Jäger
NERNICH (1999)

DER FILM ENTSTAND IN KOPRODUKTION MIT DER HOCHSCHULE FÜR FILM UND FERNSEHEN KONRAD WOLF POTSDAM-BABELSBERG,
GEFÖRDERT DURCH DIE KULTURELLE FILMFÖRDERUNG SACHSEN-ANHALT.



TECHNIK DES GLÜCKS

EIN FILM VON CHRIS WRIGHT UND STEFAN KOLBE

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