

Taking place on each of her subsequent birthdays, Julie's life is followed from ages 5 to 80 as she grows and matures, taking the audience on a journey through life's many ups and downs.

Synopsis

The Birthday Girl is an experimental short film, following the life of Julie through her day of birth, year after year. The film includes no dialogue and is instead told through short scenes which transition through match cuts to one another. From ages 5 to 80, we see how Julie's life has changed, and yet the one constant of the birthday and growing older has remained.

The throughlines of Julie's life that are explored, are her struggling to feel noticed and loved, and the romance that is present throughout between Julie and Alex, a girl who does appear to notice her. The short film attempts to capture life experience through not only character and story but aesthetic as well. By taking into consideration the visual style and technology of each different era, we want to convey as authentic a representation as possible.

Project Statement

Further, *The Birthday Girl* does not follow a traditional three act structure, instead it is told through vignettes. Life does not follow a three act structure, there is no specific moment which moves from beginning, middle to end. We strived to capture this through *The Birthday Girl*.

The film's ending for instance sees Julie celebrating her 80th birthday, alongside now, her granddaughter, Hannah, whose 5th birthday it is. Julie's story may be reaching closer to its final years; but this ending also embodies a beginning - the beginning of Hannah's life and many events that will occur to shape who she becomes.

The Birthday Girl portrays a story that never ends and will keep on being passed down from generation to generation, as long as there are birthdays to be had.

Inspiration

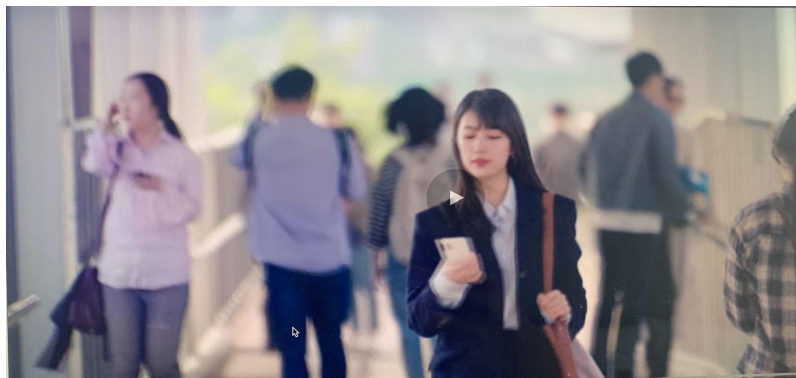
We were interested in how the idea of a birthday seems to represent a transition between life stages, and the emphasis that is often placed on having the perfect birthday. We were also intrigued by the traditions which occur on birthdays, which allow them to feel like a constant through an ever-changing life. We wish to explore this notion through *The Birthday Girl*.

Additionally, we were intrigued by the concept of always facing some sort of challenge or adversity in life and how these affect us differently during our different phases of life. What becomes our priorities? Our values? How do we communicate, and what do we want out of life? How do we change and grow as we get older, and how do these experiences temper us as people?

The character of Julie exists as an "every-person" in order to connect with the audience and show these interactions as universal and interrelated. By anchoring the narrative to her perspective, we engage the audience and encourage them to empathize with her.

Visual treatment

Rather than providing visuals on how we may have envisioned the characters, we have chosen to focus on the overall feeling and setting that these images showcase. To demonstrate the type of mood, structure and image we have in mind for some of the more prominent scenes.





The Birthday Girl

written by

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INT. DAYTIME - HOUSE

The flame of a candle burns amidst a dark room. The frame widens as the candle gets blown out by a young girl wearing a pink T-shirt, embroidered red Care Bear consuming the centre of the shirt, and a party hat. The girl has small, narrow features and blonde hair.

The little girl is JULIE, and it is her 5th birthday. She is seated at the head of the table, a cupcake in front of her with a candle that says '5'. The room is still dark, with little light illuminating the room, just enough to see the little girl and her parents and grandparents standing behind her. JULIE's FATHER has a thick brown moustache and mullet, where her MOTHER has a larger than life blonde perm sitting on her head; both parents wear daggy outfits still carried on from the late 80s. The parents are talking amongst themselves, uninterested or focused on the celebrations occurring in front of them.

JULIE looks around the room anxiously. Party decorations are hung up without effort, banners half-falling-off, a Smurfs cutout lying on the couch, not yet hung up. The long table is messy, with scrunched up party hats sitting in pools of spilt homebrand Fanta, more food loose on the tablecloth than on plates. Several other 5 year olds sit at the table, lost in their own worlds, some crying, some screaming and running around the table, but all unaware of JULIE's presence.

Another 5 year old, ALEX waddles towards JULIE and passes her a present. The girl that enters is wearing tiny overalls, with a badge of the cartoon character She-Ra on her left overall strap; she has straight brunette hair, and a birthmark the size of a 20 cent coin on the left side of her lower neck. As JULIE receives the present, an aura of calmness and joy comes over her. She excitedly places it on the table and begins to rip into the wrapping paper. The camera focuses on JULIE's hands as she attacks the wrapping paper which is placed around the box.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. AFTERNOON - GARAGE HANGOUT SPACE

JULIE is now 13, opening a present the same shape and size as the one on her 5th birthday. As she finishes opening the present, it is revealed to be a flask, full of alcohol. JULIE's eyes widen and she looks in shock over towards her friend ALEX, a slightly taller brunette girl, with a birthmark on her neck, who is sitting beside her. Late 90s pop music is playing faintly from a tape deck. ALEX makes a drinking motion with her hand, directing JULIE to take a sip.

She is unsure at first, looking around the room to the encouraging faces of two other teenagers, both boys. But it is in looking into ALEX's eyes that she ultimately decides to give it a try. As JULIE first takes a sip of the flask, she begins coughing, as ALEX and the two other teenagers laugh good-naturedly.

One of the teenagers, a boy, playfully swings his arm around JULIE's shoulder then proceeds to demonstrate his prowess in the field of taking a swig of alcohol. The boy takes too much for his skill level, embarrassingly spitting some of his mouth-full on-top of himself. JULIE, clearly unimpressed, chuckling at the boy, firmly takes his arm off her, glancing, with a smile, over at ALEX, holding in a laugh.

The boy, embarrassed, looking at the two girls, places the flask on a small table in the centre of the room, then slowly borrows two tissues from a nearby box to clean himself up in shame. ALEX and JULIE make eye contact, ALEX immediately bursting into laughter, one of her hands slapping out and brushing JULIE's leg. JULIE chuckling begins to slow, her eyes widening and a blush quickly spreads on her face. ALEX seems oblivious to the effect she has on JULIE, quickly taking the flask from the table.

ALEX pulls back and swigs the vessel. JULIE's focus is fully on ALEX, watching the girl as she swallows the alcohol, pretending to like the taste. JULIE is completely convinced, watching ALEX in admiration, appearing to be off in her own little world, daydreaming as she stares at her. The moment is interrupted.

RING RING. RING RING.

JULIE pulls out her small flip-phone from her pocket, dread filling her eyes as she knows it's from her parents. Looking at each person in the room, JULIE puts her index finger in front of her mouth to keep them quiet. She quickly composes herself trying to sound somewhat normal. Gulping, JULIE looks nervously down at her phone. The phone fills our view, JULIE's fingers are tightly wrapped around it, with clearly heavily bitten fingernails that are roughly painted black.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT/INT. MORNING - OFFICE BUILDING

An early generation iPhone displaying an incoming call from the contact name 'MUM'. The phone ring has carried on from the last scene but is more musical in nature. The fingernails of the hand holding the phone are a pink-beige colour, but the depth of bite marks appear to be somehow worse. A 24 year old JULIE answers the phone, initially happy, about to speak, but getting cut off before she can form a full word.

The voice on the other end of the phone is heard speaking continuously, overly-enthused. JULIE continues to walk determinedly down a busy city street while on the call, many other people on their smartphones, texting or calling, bump into JULIE as they don't notice the street ahead of them. But JULIE doesn't react, as if this was something she was used to already. She continues on her way clearly stressed, JULIE races across the street into a building's lobby, and then into one of the elevators.

In the elevator, JULIE is accompanied by a stern-looking woman texting, a STRANGER. Both women make eye contact momentarily, JULIE awkwardly smiling at the woman in the elevator, to have the STRANGER quickly look back at her phone without a reciprocated reaction. JULIE's expression reflects her annoyance at the woman, JULIE's MUM is still speaking on the other end of the line. JULIE is standing for the rest of the elevator ride, nails in her mouth, unsure where she should be looking, before finally reaching her floor and exiting the elevator doors. The voice on the other end of the line, still determinedly speaking, begins to drop in and out of static now as JULIE is walking through her work's floor. JULIE, now exhausted from listening for so long, takes the phone from her ear to look directly at it. JULIE attempts to tell her mother that the phone is breaking up, but before letting out a full word, the BEEPING is heard of a lost call. Indifferent about the phone call ending, JULIE places the phone back in her pocket, rising the same hand back up towards her mouth. JULIE realises her instinct to bite her nails, forcing her hand into her side pocket in order to stop.

Visibly drained, JULIE arrives at her desk which is littered with personal items and papers; a stress ball, a couple of picture frames, papers and various stationery fill the desk.

Before sitting down, JULIE unenthusiastically begins organising her desk lightly, clearing space for where she's going to work. As she's sorting, her expression quickly shifts from defeated to confused. She looks down and finally notices what's been sitting in front of her.

A small cupcake covered in rainbow icing, along with a singular rose, with a card underneath.

JULIE blushes with excitement and joy, looking around the room for an explanation. Her eyes are quickly drawn to a neighbouring cubicle containing a chair sitting a short-haired brunette woman on the phone, her name is ROSE. ROSE is still speaking on the phone, presumably to a client, but makes quick eye contact with JULIE, blowing her a silent kiss.

JULIE looks back towards her presents on the table, playfully and happily embarrassed. She reaches under the presents to pull out her card, pulling it up towards her face. JULIE's hands and the card itself are all that's visible as she begins to open it, just before the words on the card are visible, we-

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. NIGHTTIME - APARTMENT

A separate card, but completing the same action of being opened, reads 'WILL YOU MARRY ME?'. A 30 year old JULIE closes the card, revealing her girlfriend, ROSE, kneeling in front of her and presenting an open ring box, one with a large diamond in the centre. JULIE places her hand over her mouth in shock, tears well in her eyes as she excitedly nods. The apartment is clean and simplistic, with a modern, sharp design. Very little furniture takes up the large space.

ROSE rises from her kneeling position and the two women laugh as they come together into a long kiss. JULIE, still in shock, appears passive in the kiss, ROSE initiating and concluding their intimate moment. As they break away, ROSE places the diamond ring on JULIE's finger.

A party GUEST pops a bottle of champagne, quickly filling a glass for JULIE. She takes a sip, her arm wrapped around ROSE's waist. ROSE is physically joined to JULIE, but has her attention directed away from her to another party guest. JULIE is once again at the centre of a party, but all those surrounding her invested in their own small groups and conversations. She smiles towards her fiance, who is looking elsewhere. We linger on JULIE for a few moments, visibly unsure as she looks around the room. The camera pans down her arm and to a close up of JULIE's hand, focusing on the glass as well as JULIE's ring. Her arm reaches out to place the glass of champagne on the table, her hand and the glass disappearing out of frame.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. MIDNIGHT - STUDIO APARTMENT

An arm pulls a bottle of vodka from off screen, taking a quick swig. As the camera dwells on the hand holding the bottle of vodka, it is clear that the ring which had previously been on JULIE's hand is no longer there, instead her ring finger is bare. The camera pulls out to form a long shot.

A 32 year old JULIE is seated on a couch, bags under her eyes and clearly not putting much effort into looking presentable. Expression dull, and far from what you'd describe as being joyful or even content. Strewn around her are some unopened moving boxes and sparse furniture. Sitting on one of the boxes, in front of JULIE, is a small assortment of birthday cards, and one singular cupcake.

But right now, JULIE is alone.

She checks her phone briefly, staring down with an almost hopeful look at the screen. No messages. She weakly turns her head away and sighs, then proceeds to put the phone back in her pocket, taking another swig of vodka.

The camera zooms in as once again JULIE puts the vodka off screen, focusing on her hand, and bare ring finger as it slowly disappears out of frame. We linger on this frame for a beat before zooming out to a wider shot of JULIE, slumped on her couch.

We haven't jumped forward in time - we're still with JULIE amidst her half-furnished studio apartment.

A beat. She sits in silence. Drinks. Fidgets. Checks her phone. The moment lingers, stretching out to the point of discomfort. She looks at the vodka, her frown deepens as she stares for a few seconds. She puts the lid back on the vodka. We close in on her hand holding the bottle of vodka as she places it on the table, hand disappearing off frame, camera focused on her arm.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. JUST BEFORE NOON - KITCHEN

A 45 year old JULIE's hand comes back from off frame, holding a bottle of green superfood smoothie for herself. The camera focused on her hand, it becomes apparent there is a different ring on her finger. The ring consists of a small, glamorous ruby.

JULIE walks over to her fridge, pressing the glass full of smoothie against the fridge ice-dispenser. The fridge has a large touchscreen filling up the surface of the door. As the glass is filled to the brim now, a message pops up on the screen reading: "happy birthday Julez! xx". Sent from a group chat under the name 'pilates and smoothies'. JULIE notices the message, tapping the screen to return a warm response. Walking over to her kitchen bench and leaning over it, JULIE appears to be in her kitchen alone, the space is quiet. JULIE slowly takes swigs from her smoothie, shaking the cup around softly between sips.

We stay with JULIE in this calm moment, as she feels present and relaxed in her own kitchen. The silence is broken by light but audible footsteps rushing into the kitchen.

A little GIRL, seemingly 7, has run into the room, with a 3 year old BOY chasing her. The little GIRL is screaming at the BOY in an attempt for him to stop - the GIRL is visibly distraught, as if nothing this severely traumatic has ever happened to her. The little BOY has one of his fingers pointed out in front of him, with a piece of snot on the tip of it. The finger tracks the GIRL with strong determination. The two are running back and forth around the table.

JULIE remains at the kitchen bench, just watching her children with a smile on her face. A woman walks up behind her, grabbing her by the waist intimately. The woman has brunette hair, and a large birthmark on the left side of her lower neck; it's ALEX.

JULIE rubs ALEX's arms that's currently wrapped around her, softly. Both women watch for several moments, as we draw slowly closer to them. ALEX whispers something inaudible into JULIE's ear and giggles. JULIE grows an intense smile and is about to let out a large laugh. Just as the laugh begins, we...

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. SUNNY DAY - HOSPITAL

The beep of a heart rate monitor is heard against the ultrasound of a new child.

65 year old JULIE and ALEX stand beside their DAUGHTER who is laying in the ultrasound chair, still hugging in the same position as the previous scene. On the other side of the bed is the DAUGHTER's PARTNER, who is facetime-ing the SON, now a young adult man.

It's a sweet moment of domestic bliss, as ALEX and JULIE smile at each other over the head of their daughter, excited for the new addition to the family, and excited to be grandparents.

The camera sweeps across the scene before landing on the heart beat monitor, which is beating in a steady rhythm. The heart rate follows the classic shape that everyone recognised, and as it peaks we-

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. DAYTIME - HOSPITAL ROOM

The heart rate monitor dropping down from the peak, the heart rate is a little slower than the previous scene. Camera zooms out and sweeps back the way it had originally come, revealing a new hospital room and scene.

The room is clean and white, it faces a large window that showcases the vast greenery surrounding the building. The window is open, letting in the sounds of birds chirping and leaves being lightly blown in the wind. In the fairly spacious room, sits a thin screen, large and vibrant, showing clear statements relating to JULIE's health. Several details can be made out on the screen, but they are not focused on; including JULIE's full name, JULIE Ryan, respiration: low, blood oxygen: normal, medications: none, addictions: alcoholism (recovering).

Beside JULIE sits a small animatronic health assistant resembling the big hero 6 character; baymax. In its hand holds JULIE's health chart that reads her current antibiotics and lists all of her details down to the genome. For easy access.

The room continues to be tracked until we meet an 80 year old JULIE, sitting up in her hospital bed, looking of moderate health, but amble joy. She gazes around her room in awe at the decorations that her grandkids have messily put up as well as those who surround her.

A banner that spreads from one point of the room to another reads 'HAPPY BIRTHDAY'. Despite the DIY aesthetic, the excessive amount of sticky tape at each corner of the banner cements effort put in to making it stable.

In front of JULIE, on a pull out hospital tray, sits a cupcake with a lit candle. JULIE smiles at her family, before pulling up the small child standing beside her. She balances the 5 year old on her lap as the two face the cupcake. JULIE looks at her granddaughter sitting on her lap with adoration. The frame slowly fills with the cupcake, until only the candle and its flame is visible.

A beat passes.

The flame is blown out.

FADE TO BLACK

END