

A DOCUMENTARY BY  
STEFAN BOHUN



*Are You Sleeping,*

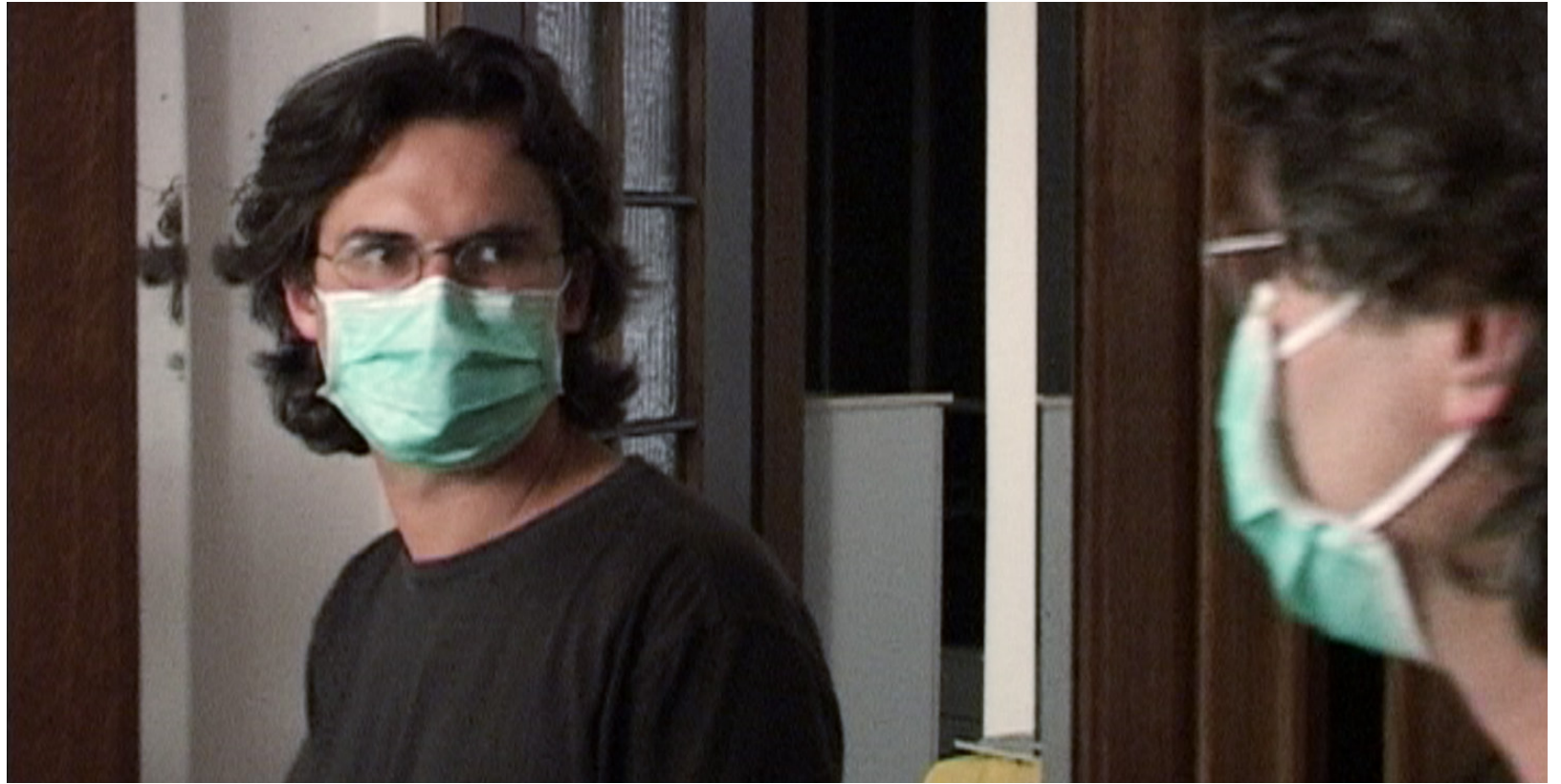
# BROTHER JAKOB?





## LOGLINE

Four brothers take a trip into the past.  
It is a shared path of memories which starts  
in the Tyrolean mountains after the fifth brother's death  
and ends in a hotel room in Porto. A personal film  
about grief and farewell, about serenity and arrival  
as well as reunion and retrieval.



## SHORT SYNOPSIS

Jakob took his life. He had emigrated to Portugal, yet was stricken with homesickness and longing. Two years later in »Are You Sleeping, Brother Jakob?« his four brothers, including director Stefan Bohun, take a trip into the past. Their different memories about the late brother gradually shape a family portrait in which everyone, even as adults, has had yet to find their place.

»Are You Sleeping, Brother Jakob?« is a very considerate, personal film about both farewell and reunion. The scattered archival footage, showing the brothers as children and teens – on mountain tops in summer, swimming together, wildly dancing and cavorting – impart an unforeseen levity. The search starts in the Tyrolean valley Lareintal and eventually ends in a hotel room in Porto with the realisation that this is not particularly a film about sadness but the necessity of grief. And about finding those who accompany us in life.



## SYNOPSIS

Jakob took his life. He had emigrated to Portugal where he worked as an anaesthetist. Yet Jakob was stricken with homesickness and longing. The last sign of life his brother Stefan received from him was his changed profile picture in a messenger app: it showed a Tyrolean valley, the Lareintal.

In just that valley two years later, his four brothers set out to a hiking trip in »Are You Sleeping, Brother Jakob?« which starts in the presence and slowly confronts them with their own past. What role did each of the five brothers have within the family? Why did Jakob feel so lonely in Porto as his messages and letters suggest? This very personal documentary, which takes its title from a famous nursery rhyme, pursues these questions. And just like the song is a four-part canon, »Are You Sleeping, Brother Jakob?« consists of several parts: the various memories about the late brother gradually shape a family portrait in which everyone, even as adults, has had yet to find their place.

Quite literally from afar, a Portuguese, female voice reads a letter she wrote the siblings after Jakob's death. „I believe that people who kill themselves do not really want to die. They want to live, but cannot cope with

their pain anymore,“ can be heard, while the camera shows the hotel room in which Jakob took his life.

»Are You Sleeping, Brother Jakob?« is a considerable film about grief and farewell, about serenity and arrival as well as reunion and retrieval. The scattered home video footage, in which the brothers can be seen as children and teens – at mountain summits in summer, wildly dancing and cavorting – impart »Are You Sleeping, Brother Jakob?« an unforeseen levity. What is not possible anymore is juxtaposed to what once used to be.

That is why Stefan Bohun's film tells less about sadness, but rather about the necessity of grief and the sibling's reunion. When the four brothers continue their tracking in Porto, they lie on the beach, exchanging their thoughts and past memories with their heads next to each other and the Portuguese sun in their faces. „The five of us could take a road trip across Portugal and Spain next year,“ Stefan Bohun reads from one of Jakob's letters. He had discovered so many great places, he wrote. „Hope to hear from you soon, brother.“





## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

For me, this film is the act of embarking together on a journey of mourning after my brother's suicide. An approach to my brother Jakob develops into a voyage through time and space with my three remaining brothers. The common ground of our childhood is ruptured. The conflicts and different viewpoints that the brothers have about the past draw a vivid family portrait. In addition to the necessity of mourning, I am searching for moments of lightness, because my brother valued humour. This film enabled me to sort the memories of experiences we had together as well as to create a space for emotions, giving them a form and an outlet. »Are You Sleeping, Brother Jakob?« is farewell and reunion at the same time.

*Stefan Bohun*



## INTERVIEW WITH STEFAN BOHUN

by MICHAEL PEKLER

*After a series of old pictures that show you and your brothers, your film starts with a hiking tour in the Tyrolean valley Lareintal. This idyllic setting is then juxtaposed with Porto, the city where Jakob took his life, and you and your brothers visit this city in the second half of the movie. How much did these places define the concept of the film?*

This is related to the original conception that I had of the film. The initial plan saw more persons participating, especially some of our more distant relatives. But as the work on the film progressed, more and more people felt that they would prefer not to be present in the film, and of course we accepted that choice. At that time, I was still searching, trying this thing or that. Making a film about your own family is hard in general – in this respect, my family does not differ much from other families. Therefore, I decided to concentrate on my brothers, and suddenly I came upon this picture. It was made in Lareintal and Jakob had chosen it as his WhatsApp profile picture. That was the first piece of the puzzle – because we were wondering why he had chosen this picture.

*The two settings also tell of two different journeys.*

I would rather say that more stations of the journey were set in Portugal. For example, the cemetery, the hotel room where Jakob took his life – a place that we approach very slowly in the course of the film. But there was also the beach, and the hospital where Jakob worked. The film is an approach to Jakob, but at the same time it is a farewell. An attempt to come closer to a person who was reserved, who did not reveal much of himself. Through a confrontation with these places, or rather with the memory of these places, I saw this path opening up in front of me.

*How is it possible to combine farewell and approach?*

I approached this job intuitively, so some things developed as time went by. But I never wanted to make a typical farewell film – if there even is a thing like that. The approximation was more in the foreground. I wanted to create a vivid version of Jakob, to relive my relationship with him once again in a certain way. When he died, I did not want to simply say: “Okay, that was that.” But of course, it is a farewell, one that is directly connected with Jakob’s love of the mountains. Standing on a summit, as we did at the end of our hiking tour, can be a truly spiritual experience.

***It is not only the conversations between the brothers that paint a vivid picture of Jakob, we also get to know him through the archive material that you repeatedly use. What kind of criteria did you apply for the selection of these materials?***

Viewing these recordings was a process of its own, in addition to shooting the film. My idea was that Jakob should be present in these pictures. The decisive question was how we could let the viewers feel his presence. Of course, there were some doubts, but I think that you can feel Jakob even when he is not there. Just a little while after shooting the film, I found some letters that Jakob had written to me in the 1990ies. These texts made me see everything in a new light again, as they showed Jakob as a reserved person who reveals himself in his letters.

***On the one hand, you show typical family pictures from feasts, excursions and summer holidays, but there are also surprising pictures shot in everyday-life situations.***

Some of these pictures were made when I was still a film student at the Wiener Filmakademie – at that time I was constantly filming something. Always with the thought in the back of my head that maybe I could use that material at some point. I got the urge to film every-day life, because even if I did not plan a film, I wanted to participate in something. Therefore, we can show this other side of family life in »Are You Sleeping, Brother Jakob?«: a picture of brothers doing apparently normal things when they are together. And still, much of it is about boundaries and individuality, company and autonomy.

***Would you say that this film as a joint project has changed the relationship between you and your brothers, and if so, how? Did you find a new perspective on the past?***

Yes, definitely. I would not say that the film has helped us process the past, because processing is very personal and varies from person to person. It is hard to share that with others. And it is not easy for me to say how the relationship to the others has changed, because I myself am affected, I am in the relationship. But the feeling of having created something together, something special, that feeling is very strong. And it connects us.

***At one point, one of your brothers says: “You fear the transience of things”, and another brother replies: “I think we all fear that.” Does your film deal to some extent with the human attempt to flee one’s own transience?***

Becoming aware of death or of the memory of something horrible is bound to provoke fear. This is also the case when someone from your immediate surroundings – your family or your circle of friends – commits suicide. You start to fear that you yourself could also be capable of such a thing.

***Your film features many discussions. Of course, many of them are concerned with Jakob, but some conversations take a surprising turn.***

Our family has always been very talkative, we value conversations to a high degree. What the film shows is the different use and application of language by us brothers. Language can be a weapon, you can defend yourself with it and conceal your insecurities, or you can discuss something to death. On the other hand, it is very important to detect and define

the moments when nothing is said. To see the moments when words are failing us. Shooting a film with or about people who like to talk is more difficult than making one with protagonists who do not talk much. ***Because people attribute more authenticity to silence?*** Exactly. And because language demands the attention and concentration that you would otherwise devote to the pictures.

***Talking about language: We hear Jakob in the voice of a Portuguese woman who reads his letters and talks about Jakob and his longing for home. You yourself read from the letters that he wrote to you.***

The woman’s voice belongs to Jakob’s former work colleague and close friend. We met her after the funeral. His letters to me are very important because they touched something personal. They only concern me, not my brothers.



*How did you deal with your double role as brother and director?*

Of course, it is not always easy to operate in a dual function. I saw myself as a filmmaker and at the same time in the role of the brother. For this reason, the work of my camera operator was very important. Because he was the one on the outside – and he was very contained in that function. On the other hand, my brothers perceived me as filmmaker, albeit after some hesitation. This has less to do with our relationship with each other and more with the feeling of exposure in front of the camera.

*Although your film tells a story about saying goodbye, it has a peaceful, maybe even a little optimistic note.*

*How do you complete such a film journey?*

I thought about this question for a long time. At first, I had the idea to put the archived material at the end. I thought that was an exciting concept. Getting to know Jakob, who is now familiar to the viewers, by means of the archived pictures. But I soon realized that this was not the right ending. Now the film ends on the mountain summit that we climbed together. A conventional but proper ending.





## STEFAN BOHUN / BIOGRAPHY & FILMOGRAPHY

born in Mödling, Austria, in 1979

### Education

- 10/2011 Acting workshop  
with Susan Batson,  
Vienna Film Academy
- since 2008 MA at Vienna Film  
Academy under  
the direction of  
Peter Patzak and  
Michael Haneke
- 3–6/2008 Term abroad at  
BILGI University,  
Istanbul
- 2002–2007 BA Directing with first  
class honors at Vienna  
Film Academy under  
the direction of  
Peter Patzak and  
Michael Haneke
- 1999/2000 School of Physical  
Theatre, Toronto

### Filmography

- KÖNIGINNEN** (in development)  
feature fiction film
- ARE YOU SLEEPING,  
BROTHER JAKOB?**  
81 Minutes, documentary
- MUSIK** 2014  
38 Minutes, short fiction film,  
graduation film Vienna Film  
Academy
- MATA TIGRE** 2008/2009  
70 Minutes, documentary
- AMO BEETHOVEN** 2007  
35 Minutes, HDV documentary,  
ORF/3Sat 2007
- OMID** 2005  
5 Minutes, 16mm short fiction film,  
3Sat/ZDF/Vienna Film Academy
- NOHELIA** 2004/2005  
32 Minutes, DvCam/16mm,  
documentary

### Awards (Selection)

- Best documentary  
(Are You Sleeping,  
Brother Jakob?)  
Mumbai International  
Film Festival 2018
- First Steps Award 2014
- Best short film,  
Diagonale 2014
- Best Documentary,  
Film Festival Vienna 2005



## REVIEWS

One of the most sensitive and cleverly composed documentaries of this year's Diagonale.

*Der Standard*, Dominik Kamalzadeh

»Are You Sleeping, Brother Jakob?« is an intimate, wonderful obituary that gets under your skin. Bohun succeeds in composing a profoundly dense film with the help of his excellent cinematographer Klemens Hufnagl. A very subtle and moving film.

*Saarbrückener Zeitung*, Christoph Schreiner

A deconstruction of pain that transcends time to bring closure to a grieving family. The narrative emphasizes time itself through the deliberate use of prolonged shots and archival footage which opens the cracks in the perfect image of a family that have faced the suicide of their brother. Its a wakeup call to notice the things unsaid.

*Jury Statement*, Mumbai International Filmfestival

## CREDITS

AT 2018, 80 min,  
2K Cinemascope, Dolby 5.1

**Director** Stefan Bohun  
**Script** Stefan, Johannes, David Bohun  
**DOP** Klemens Hufnagl  
**Sound** Hjalti Bager-Jonathansson  
**Editing** Marek Kralovsky  
**Producers** Ralph Wieser, David Bohun

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