

Milou Gevers about SUMMER WITHOUT YOU

“I still know all the steps by heart”

Milou Gevers, who just received the ECFA Doc Award for *WHY DIDN'T YOU STAY FOR ME?* is already presenting her next film. *SUMMER WITHOUT YOU* is part of a series of short documentaries for Dutch television on the theme of 'divorce' and tells about children who meet each other at a camping site for single-parent families. Between Quinn and Julie, two visitors to the campsite, conversations about their parents' divorce get going smoothly.

Milou Gevers: I honestly enjoyed making *SUMMER WITHOUT YOU*. *WHY DIDN'T YOU STAY FOR ME?* felt very personal, but I was also familiar with the theme of the new film. My parents were divorced. In my circle of friends it is almost exceptional when the parents of a child are still together. In *SUMMER WITHOUT YOU* I was able to explore this subject on my own terms.

That is why you went to a single-parent campsite in France.

Gevers: Apparently there is a great need for single-parent holidays. You

will find such campsites at numerous locations. For single parents it is nice to meet fellow companions and share experiences. But the first goal is celebrating a fun holiday full of activities for children.

Quinn is attending today's festival screening with both his parents, who are very proud of the film.

Gevers: Quinn and his family have already come a long way in the processing. With Julie's family things are still more fragile, that's why I brought them together in the film so that they could learn from each other. They spent a lot of time together during that holiday.

Did you select the children beforehand?

Gevers: Not all the kids on the campsite of course, but I selected Julie and Quinn - I found it interesting to work with two characters this time; you don't often see that in children's documentaries. The situation was very different for the two of them, but I hoped they would match, and that is



what happened, they became close friends from day one.

How they find each other and then have to let go of each other again adds an extra storyline to the film.

Gevers: I had hoped for that, but you never know if it will work. I had asked to put their tents next to each other and divide them into the same groups for activities, but I could never predict that girls and boys at the campsite would enjoy each other's company so much and that maybe - which we touch only very subtly - careful crushes would grow. But the film is primarily about love and loyalty towards your parents.

Which becomes apparent when Quinn draws a heart and unexpectedly writes... dad next to it.

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Gevers: Just like *WHY DIDN'T YOU STAY FOR ME?* this story is about things your parents did for which you might be angry with them, but love is always part of it. These children are honestly concerned about their parents. For example, Quinn says emphatically that he wishes for a new love for his mum and he even has a plan for that: "It must be someone who can show some resistance, but mum should wear a dress more often..." I find it so touching when kids carry these adult elements within during their childhood.

At no point do they blame their parents.

Gevers: The approach of the film was: how can you have a nice life again af-





ter your parents have divorced? Once you get used to it, it can turn out pretty nice in the end.

It rains all the time at the campsite, which adds something gloomy to the film.

Gevers: The rain fits nicely with the first scenes when the kids haven't found any friends yet and still have to get used to the place. We were afraid that it would rain all week and that there would be no outdoor activities, but luckily the sun started to shine after a few days, claiming her place in the film.

As a run up to the conversations, you use letters that Julie and Quinn write to their fathers.

Gevers: I knew from the preparatory

talks that they would miss their father very much; Julie was thrilled to be so far away from him for the first time. We only had four shooting days – too few to work from pure observation, so we needed a common thread throughout the story. Those letters were a handy way to find out what was going on in their heads. Throughout the film, the letters get less and less attention, because the children think less about their absent fathers. All attention goes to their new friends, that's how I've always experienced my childhood holidays: you almost forget that your parents exist and the only thing you have on your mind are your friends. That's why I keep the parents out of the picture as much as possible; the story takes place exclusively among the children.



You went camping with them?

Gevers: Our tent stood next to theirs; they used it as their chill-out spot. We did that shot in the "disco tent" when a party spontaneously started at our place. I joined them in all the country line dances. We practised daily; I still know the steps by heart. Every morning I woke up to the sound of the kids passing our tent to brush their teeth, yelling "What are we going to film today? We're already dressed!" And the last thing I heard at the end of the day was a "good night" from the tent next door.

Without passing judgement, SUMMER WITHOUT YOU makes clear the unpleasant consequences of living with divorced parents.

Gevers: The children talk to me about

things other than what they discuss with their parents. Sometimes that is funny, but sometimes it is quite confrontational for the parents. Without shying away from the real consequences of a divorce, I still wanted to make a feel-good film with a happy ending. Other episodes in this TV series mainly focused on anger and sadness; while I wanted to show what it is like when you get further along in the processing, when a certain acceptance has already grown. There are so many stories of children with divorced parents, and not every story is deeply tragic.

–
Gert Hermans