

Review: The documentary ‘Salt in My Soul’ is a moving tribute to Mallory Smith



Mallory Smith in the documentary “Salt in My Soul.” (Jacob Jonas)

BY KIMBER MYERS

JAN. 20, 2022 6:09 PM PT

The Times is committed to reviewing theatrical film releases during the [COVID-19 pandemic](#). Because moviegoing carries risks during this time, we remind readers to follow health and safety guidelines as [outlined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and [local health officials](#).

Intimacy pervades the moving documentary “Salt in My Soul,” based on the posthumously published journals of [Mallory Smith](#), a vibrant young woman with [cystic fibrosis](#). Smith chronicled her experience with both raw honesty and real eloquence, and director Will

Battersby refuses to cut away from more painful moments of the disease and its effects on Smith and her family. Otherwise, Battersby's by-the-numbers style obfuscates the power of Smith's inspiring life.

Interviews, family photos and home videos are interspersed with footage of Smith's final years, creating a cinematic legacy. "Salt in My Soul" follows Smith as she fights CF alongside her devoted family while trying to live as close to normal as possible. Treatments and hospital stays punctuate her experience of playdates, vacations and dorm-room hangouts over the years, with Smith's vivacity and tenacity encouraging her friends, family and doctors — and the audience, in turn.

"Salt in My Soul" is emotionally affecting, but its ordinary approach hamstring the story of a woman who seemed truly extraordinary. It often seems tailored more as a tribute to Smith for those who knew her, offering scant captions that introduce talking-head interviewees with only their first name, leaving surnames and connection to Smith and her life ambiguous. Battersby's film also doesn't always explain medical terms used, making it less impactful for those without Smith's experience and more resonant for those who have CF, an isolating experience because bacteria passed from one patient to another can be deadly. "Salt in My Soul" refers to the healing powers of ocean water for CF patients, but unfortunately Battersby only skims the surface here.