

# ‘Salt in My Soul’ Review: Living, Even Thriving, With Illness

This documentary reconstructs the life of Mallory Smith, who died at 25 after a lifelong battle with cystic fibrosis.



Mallory Smith and Jack Goodwin as seen in the documentary “Salt in My Soul.” Giant Pictures

By Ben Kenigsberg

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## Salt in My Soul

Making a documentary that doubles as a final testament is no easy task. But with access to family members, doctors, personal reflections and hospital footage (which includes a surgery), [“Salt in My Soul”](#) poignantly reconstructs the life of Mallory Smith, who received a diagnosis of cystic fibrosis at 3 years old. She died in 2017 at 25, just as she had started to undergo [an experimental treatment aimed at destroying the antibiotic-resistant bacteria](#) that had made her course with the illness much more difficult.

Despite the challenges of living with the disease, she became an accomplished athlete, a Stanford graduate and an indomitable life force, judging from the testimonies of those close to her and from her own words. The director, Will Battersby, draws on audio and video that Smith recorded and a journal she kept privately over a decade. (She gave her mother the password to be used after her death.) Her writings were condensed into the 2019 book “Salt in My Soul: An Unfinished Life.”

The movie becomes many things: a memorial; an awareness-raising tool about cystic fibrosis and the possibilities of bacteriophage therapies; and a consideration of how it’s possible to live as Smith said she endeavored to — assuming she would die the next day while still, as she put it in a diary entry, “prolonging my life + planning for my future.”

Smith thought that knowing she didn’t have much time gave her a perspective most people lack. Her journal, a friend suggests, gave her an outlet for her frustrations that permitted her to stay outwardly optimistic.

“Salt in My Soul” is extremely painful to watch, especially as it shows the roller coaster of Smith’s recurring hospitalizations. But it does paint a vivid portrait of who she was and what she believed.

**Salt in My Soul**

Not rated. Running time: 1 hour 36 minutes. In theaters.