

# Kaja W. Polmar remebered

Kaja Wright Polmar was the daughter of Morten and Anne, and a sister of Sara. She married Bård and they lived together happily ever after - but only for one day. She died at the age of 28.

Kaja was an animation director and my closest alie in Norwegian Animation miljø. Sometimes she worked on my films, sometimes I worked on hers. First time I met Kaja when she was a student of Animation college in Volda, and I was teaching there. She worked together with Mats Grorud and they made an ~~oppgave-film called En 3-tyer-fold-gjert~~ ~~oppgave-film called En 3-tyer-fold-gjert~~ was telling incredible things. Girl's story went like this: She has a dog, and a kjæreste who is afraid of dogs. Girl has a dilemma, she has to choose one or another. She choose kjæreste, and lost the dog. Now she have a dilemma again - should she be sad or happy? And she is sad and happy, a little-bit of both. It was really beautiful film which stood out immediately. Kaja has a very distinctive style of storytelling - slightly absurd, child-like, but very clear. She would send her character in to a very dramatic experience and the end would be always a bit sad, but the character would take it with a light heart.



Kaja's eksamenfilm ~~was called Collaboration with her~~ ~~was called Collaboration with her~~ class-mate Siri Natvik. If you look at all Kaja's films (she made 6 all together) you can always see the connection to a previous work. It is always an elaboration on one or another detail, or theme, or a technical discovery she made. Kaja loved to collaborate with other authors. In her mind, the collective decision was as good as individual one, or even better. Objectively, that would make no difference in her case because she would always manage to persuade her partner. In all her collaboration works you can see clearly: This is Kaja's hand.

*Moren som ikke gråt* had the same storytelling technique as in *En liten forteller*. Little girl narrates, telling us a very dramatic event of her Father's death and Mother's grief. The narrator does not fully understand what is happening, but we do. It was melancholic and sweet film, like all Kaja's stories. Light, but sad at the same time.



At the end of school Kaja and Siri came to work on my film *Aria* as praktikanter. Then I got to know that Kaja was an Anarkist, Blitz-activist and wanted to change the world. One Monday she came late for work.

-?Parting hard in the weekend?? - I asked

-?No, I was in jail"

-????!!!!???

-?I was on a demonstration against prisons and we set a symbolic fire to a State prison. And then those Police came with dogs and batons and arrested us, though I told them that fire was symbolic!

"You know" - she said - "I like old police-guys because they are often nice, but those Police-Academy students are real assholes, put a handcuffs too tight, and twist your arms and all that. They kept me on a concrete floor in the glatt-celle in my underpants all night, and there was an amazing Police-woman, she had a mustash!! I liked her.?"

Kaja then was 20. She was wearing a big ring in the nose and dread-locks. Her eyes were round, blue and open wide. She was very much in love with Bård, who was a Punk-Rocker. He also had a dread-locks and wide open blue eyes. Together they looked like brother and sister, but their luck was that they were not.

Next year Kaja was diagnosed with cancer, operated immediately, and put on chemo-therapy. Her struggle with illness lasted 6 years. Despite of illness, those were her most productive years, during which she created her main body of work. One can only imagine what she could have done if she would be well.

At the time David, Mikkel, Erik and I just started Pravda company. We had an animation department struggling for survival. So, one day Kaja came to Pravda and, standing by the coffee-machine, said precisely those very words:

-?I got cancer and this is very boring. So, I think, you, guys, should employ me, and I will put your animation studio in order?.

And so she did. Kaja had a talent to put things in order and make it function. That was her idea of

Anarkism - in the absence of central power, people will get things organised by their natural in-built discipline. Kaja started by coordinating the studio, animating and making props for my film *Through My Thick Glasses*.

Kaja loved to animate. Her biggest talent, though, was a director's talent when you tell your story with other people's voices, so to speak. But Kaja loved to animate herself. Later she said that she did her best and her worst animation in

*Through My Thick Glasses*. Best was a scene when young Tante Ella jumping the rope as a little bløtt-kake jenta. Kaja put so much of herself in that jumping girl, that it was practically a self-portret. Worst was not even a scene, but a hand movement in a beach-scene. I didn't edited it away but kept in the film, and later used it many times as a last argument in our endless political discussions: -?If you really think that your Anarkists are better than my Bolsheviks ? how could you animate that lame hand?!?

It always worked.

[Asylsøker](#) was her next film, and it took three long years to complete because she was going in and out of chemo-therapy. She wanted to make a film about tough kids from the immigrant-miljø, and she wanted to use real kids for the voices. So, one day Pravda's backyard was flooded with very small and very enthusiastic children of all the colors of rainbow. They went through Pravda like Amazonian ants, and Kaja was the only one who could conduct them. Her Majesty Queen of Ants.



The story of

*Asylsøker* goes like this: Emigrant children in the backyard are playing asylmottak. Everyone who comes in the backyard is taken as asylsøker, and have to tell the story about the dangers he or she is running from. The stories are varied from Polar Bear invasion to a Mermaids and Ghosts. However wild the stories are, the seeker is always getting asylum in the backyard. Suddenly, two police officers enter the backyard. To pass through the crowd of kids they have to play along, asking for asylum. They get asylum alright, but the real aim of their visit is to deliver a søknad avslag to one of emigrant family. One of the kids will leave his friends forever.

It was a beautifully written story, and film itself had this playful lightness of children's game. The sadness, the melancholy was not in the film, but outside of it, in our grown-up perception of the events. This elegant storytelling was Kaja's elaboration on something she discovered on her previous films. Helped with photography of Janne Hansen, the film was really nice piece of work. There is a great atmosphere in the film, and you really feel that the backyard is one safe place in a storming world. Through the events of the story we also saw that safety is illusory. We saw it - but the kids in the backyard didn't see it that way.

*Asylsøker* was a political film, but not entirely. It was a film about childhood, a poetic metaphor. The film was a success. It went around festivals, was awarded several times. Kaja had a chance to taste the recognition of the audience, travel to different countries - all between the chemo-

therapy sessions.

At the same time, Kaja and I had an undoable project: an animation feature about Russian Revolution. We invented a term «Mok **animacumentary**» which is a kind of animation reconstruction of events. We managed to persuade Bjørn Godøy - a great scriptwriter and documentalist - to write the script based on our research of Russian Revolution. Soon it all boiled down to one question: Who, actually, made the Revolution? We went to Russia and interview many strange-looking people, each one of them telling his own amazing version of Revolution. We also interview many Norwegian Revolution enthusiasts and heard more amazing versions.



Trying to compose a truthful picture of Revolution we promised to each other not push forward our personal favorites. But secretly, we both secretly have kept our fingers crossed in the pocket: Kaja always tried to push forward the Anarkists, and I tried to push Bolsheviks of course. Bjørn wrote 9 (!) different scripts, each one truly great piece of filmwriting, but each one objected by one of us for political reasons. Finally, irritated with both of us, Bjørn defined his own favorites - the Mensheviks! Then we got completely blocked and decided that we better just stay friends and leave Revolution alone.

We didn't discover who made the Revolution, but there was a side effect of our research: Kaja changed her appearance. Studying about Revolution she became fascinated with Alexandra Kolontai, a Russian woman-revolutioner who has a strong connection to Norway. Kolontai was a Wilde Cat of Revolution, though she was an upper-class lady and kept her small bourgeois habits intact. As a Revolutionary experiment, Kaja changed her own appearance to more lady-like. Dreadlocks and ring in the nose disappeared, she began to wear dresses and pearls. I have storyboarded ?Revolution?, making about 500 drawings, and the main character there was Kaja-looking Alexandra Kolontai.

Those were good times: the illness was seemingly defeated, *Asyløkere* were running towards successful end, Kaja was looking healthy and pretty with her new Kolontai-style. She moved together with her beloved Bård, and was, basically, very happy. Somewhere about that time Kaja made two films: one was a pixelated music video for Bård's band, and another which was a little film called *With* Siri Natvik and Inga Sætre, good old friends from Volda-college. Music-video has many good ideas, and *UT!* was a remarkable little film. It was a POV of a baby getting born. All done on the Glass-table, it was beautiful, inventive and free in its expression.



Kaja's next film was an internet project called *Anarkist er Død*, collaboration with Jonas Bals. It was about one old man we have met during our research on Revolution. We invite him for a talk, but he was not very talkative. He was just sitting, smoking his rollings. Kaja liked the old man, and when he died, she wanted to make a film about him. Old man was not particularly close to her, but she simply found it unfair that he died. She wanted him to stick around, so to speak. So, she made his animated portrait, just like we saw him: sitting, smoking his rollings.

Kaja wanted to make a film about Cancer, about how it actually works. It was a very fantasy-full project, aiming to fight the fear of Cancer. She wanted to put it in to images, like those which she had while lying under chemotherapy, or under narcotics. She wanted to fight Cancer on her home-ground, where she had the upper hand. That project never came to be realised, but later she made a little film where she tested the universe of her imaginable inner-body. It was about how the Drugs work on the brain. I was astonished seeing the sketches - the images were so original, powerful and funny at the same time! Kaja finally found her own world of expression, it was complete. That little film was her last animation work.

Kaja's last artwork was an installation on Valkyrien-station, and that was a collaboration with another close friend, Marianne. Many, many friends worked for Kaja on this installation. Valkyrien is an abandoned station between Nationaltheatret and Majorstua, you would never guess it's there. So, the installation worked like this: Train runs in the dark, and suddenly you see a glimpse of tropic: palms, green grass, blue sky. There is a comfy chair there, line of colored lights? Cosy, sweet place, a childish image of Paradise. At that time Kaja was already told that her days are counted. She was taken off the medication, only pain-killers left.



Kaja passed away before her time, but she managed to make so many, many things. Did I mention them all?

We did a pilot for a project called *Karamel-gull katt*, animating flat puppets made of led. We had some children-related TV projects on the drawing board, and she even made me teach some children. She was working on a story

about Russian Jipsy-Queen. She was working on something about Asylsøker who tells a-a-a-maising storys, which might even be true! Kaja was building a little studio together with Mats Grorud. She had plans to work with her Dad, producer Morten Polmar.

Kaja was very much loved and respected in the filmbranch. Her work was recognised. Everyone was ready to help, but everyone knew: There is a good chance that we are going to loose her. Giving her talent, the intensity of her artistic development, her carisma and ability to matherialise ideas, and not the last - her morall standing - Kaja would have become a sentral figure in Norwegien cultural landscape. If she would live.

Kaja allways reminded me of a bird, a Falcon - becose of those big round eyes she had, wide-open and clear. Partnership with Kaja was - like having a brave Falcon siting on your sholder. Now my Falcon flyed away. What shall I do?

**Pjotr Sapegin**

14 June 2007