

# Breakfast with Curtis: In Search of Lost Time



Summers are all-too-brief periods into which are packed memories of events that later may only dimly be remembered and even more dimly understood, no matter how much people are changed by them: *Breakfast with Curtis* is a film about such a summer.

Providence native Laura Colella serves as director, writer and cinematographer of a visually sophisticated telling of an original story set almost entirely within two neighboring houses, one a three-storey *de facto* hippie commune nicknamed “The Purple Citadel” where Syd (Theo Green) and Pirate (Adele Parker) eke out a living selling used books by mail from their first floor apartment and the other where socially awkward prodigy 14-year-old Curtis (Jonah Parker) lives with his parents Simon (David Parker) and Sylvie (Virginia Laffey). Upstairs from Syd and Pirate are, on the second floor, elderly Sadie (Yvonne Parker) who interrupts her recreational poetry reading for the occasional wild party and, on the third floor, couple Frenchy (Aaron Jungels) and Paola (Colella) whose tastes run to yoga, tightrope walking, blowgun dart shooting and unconventional romantic exploration.

Syd, trying to make up for his having spoken too sternly to Curtis five years earlier when he was 9 years old, enlists the boy as a videographer to record his rambling stream-of-consciousness riffs on random subjects. The initially monosyllabic Curtis, playing Boswell to Syd’s Johnson, is drawn into and accepted by the collection of eccentrics next door as he begins to see that adults, including his parents, are often very different from the way they would prefer to be seen by the world - and that youthful risk-taking was a common precursor to happy adulthood.

At one point, Syd remarks how he feels sorry for Curtis’ father Simon because he has a “real job” and has to spend time commuting in traffic every day. Interspersed with all of this bohemianism are visual cues that there is more similarity under the surface than might be expected: Syd and Simon both keep chessboards, for example. The two houses even have parallel cats, one gray and the other orange. Syd as raconteur consistently returns to the theme of connectedness, whether absurdly suggesting Ping-Pong as a metaphor for life or solemnly reminiscing about his earlier cat, now buried in his yard behind a Buddha statuette. Sense of place for the characters is established by a garden of sunflowers and clutter of mementos for Syd and Pirate, an even more cluttered space for Sadie, and meticulously neat space for Curtis and his parents. Time often speeds up and slows down, showing the passing of sunlight

and seasons, as it does in involuntary memory as if tasting a madeleine sponge cake; it's a brilliant conceit of cinematography.

The City of Providence itself stars prominently, not only because summer in due course changes to fall and then to winter, but because the counter-cultural East Side seems ideally hospitable to such an assemblage of idiosyncratic oddballs - and not just because Syd sometimes wears a T-shirt with an image of the gravestone of H.P. Lovecraft. Colella explained that her no-budget production relied on her real household and neighbors: the actors actually live where their characters do and have personalities similar to their characters despite the story being entirely fictional, although inspired by the *Breakfast with Theo* series on YouTube where Jonah Parker (who is, she said, nothing like Curtis) was the videographer for Theo Green.

Everyone who has experienced a youthful "seminal summer" that changed their lives will see a bit of themselves in this very tightly written, well-done film, and everyone who has not will be reminded that there is yet still time.

At the Cable Car Cinema & Cafe, 204 South Main Street, Providence, RI 02903, 401-272-3970  
<http://www.cablecarcinema.com>

The film: <http://www.breakfastwithcurtis.com>

Our profile of the filmmaker: <http://motifri.com/scene-and-heard-a-profile-of-laura-colella/>

"Greatest hits" compilation from *Breakfast with Theo*, the real-life inspiration for the films-within-the-film: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mlcPt9tBz0g>