Wilful Forgetting

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By Neil Cooper

Long before anyone posted selfies on Flickr or Tumblr, or Instagram allowed just-snapped camera phone images to be customised to whatever sepia-tinted vintage look is deemed aesthetically pleasing this week, memories came in Eastmancolour and Kodachrome, and took a week to be developed.

So it goes in Donna Rutherford and Martin O'Connor's lo-fi multimedia meditation on the past that shapes us, and how the narrative of memory comes with gaps.

A mother (Rutherford) is at the kitchen table as the audience enter to the comforting smell of baking. Sporting a maternal pinny, she goes through the motions of baking a cake as a country music soundtrack plays. Behind her, images flash up of other mothers proudly showing off their infant children to be immortalised in their now frayed and crumpled glory. In between snatches of Rutherford's own out-front monologue, voices-off reveal a schism down the generations as her son comes to terms with his sexuality, leaving the past behind as he goes.

Commissioned by Glasgay!, and lasting just as long as it takes a cake to rise, there's something touchingly honest going on here, both in its depiction of necessary estrangement and in Rutherford's understated delivery.

As she necks another gin in between ingredients, the pains of a generation bound by traditions not of their own making aren't difficult to recognise. In this way, Wilful Forgetting is an elegy of sorts, even as Rutherford and O'Connor's text looks forward to more complex and possibly more enlightened family affairs.

As videos of some current mums and babies at play are shown while Rutherford slices her cake, this snapshot of sons, mothers and mothers' mothers becomes the most loving of purgings.