

Dying for Beginners a Film by Kurt Langbein 2026

400 characters

When the renowned science journalist Kurt Langbein receives the diagnosis “terminal cancer,” a professional topic suddenly becomes an existential question.

In his deeply personal documentary *DYING FOR BEGINNERS*, Langbein sets out on a journey to the boundary between life and death. With the curiosity of a researcher and the vulnerability of a patient, he asks about what awaits us all — and discovers a surprising truth: dying is something we can learn.

Long form

After receiving the diagnosis “terminal cancer,” science journalist Kurt Langbein shifts from observer to patient. In *DYING FOR BEGINNERS*, he embarks on a journey that is both deeply personal and essayistic, exploring the boundary between life and death. Moving between intensive care units, palliative medicine, medical ethics, psycho-oncology, spiritual traditions, and accounts of near-death experiences, the film examines how our society deals with dying — and what happens when the finiteness of one’s own life is no longer an abstract idea.

Drawing on his own medical history and the death of a close friend, Langbein interweaves medical, philosophical, and existential perspectives. He speaks with doctors, researchers, end-of-life companions, and people who have already come close to death. The result is a multi-layered, thoughtful, and deeply moving panorama about fear, hope, self-determination, dignity, and the question of whether we can learn to let go.

DYING FOR BEGINNERS is a documentary essay about the last great taboo of our time — and at the same time a surprisingly life-affirming film about the art of living with the knowledge of death.

A Film by	Kurt Langbein
Cinematography	Christian Roth
Editing	Harald Aue
Music	Thomas Thurnher-Hohl
Production	Langbein & Partner Media
Running time	92 minutes

Kurt Langbein

Producer and Director of documentaries like „The Evolution of Altruism“ (2011, *Leopold Ungar-Preis*), „Wonder Healing“ (2012, *ROMY best TV-Doc 2013*), „Lang Grabbing“ (2015), „Utopia Revisited“ (2018), „The Farmer and the Hipster“ (2022), „Project Ballhausplatz“ (2023).

Axel Corti Price for excellent work in TV 2013, Dr. Karl Renner-Preis for life's work 2018.

Press Text (approx. 3000 characters)

When renowned science journalist Kurt Langbein receives the diagnosis of terminal cancer, a professional subject becomes an existential question: How do we die—and what does it actually mean to die?

In his deeply personal documentary *DYING FOR BEGINNERS*, Langbein sets out on a journey to the boundary between life and death. With the curiosity of a researcher and the vulnerability of a patient, he asks what awaits us all—and what we so rarely talk about. The film takes us into intensive care units and palliative wards, to doctors, scientists, philosophers, and end-of-life caregivers. It shows how modern medicine can prolong life—while simultaneously raising new ethical questions. What does it mean that more and more people die in intensive care units? When is a person truly dead? And who decides when treatment becomes a burden?

At the same time, Langbein encounters people facing death in very different ways: seriously ill patients preparing for farewell; a death midwife accompanying people at the end of life; physicians striving to relieve suffering and preserve dignity; and individuals who, after near-death experiences, describe moments in which fear suddenly gives way to profound peace.

The film also looks beyond the boundaries of Western medicine. From psycho-oncological research and traditional healing methods to philosophical and spiritual perspectives, a multifaceted picture emerges of what health, illness, and consciousness may mean.

Throughout, *DYING FOR BEGINNERS* remains closely tied to Langbein's personal journey. He speaks openly about his own illness, about hopes and setbacks, and about how to live with the awareness of one's own mortality. His encounters with patients, doctors, and researchers become stages of a journey that connects scientific insight with personal experience.

The film does not offer simple answers. Instead, it invites us to reconsider one of life's greatest certainties: that life is finite.

And that it is precisely this finiteness that can give life its depth.

DYING FOR BEGINNERS is a moving, intelligent, and surprisingly life-affirming exploration of the greatest taboo in our society—and an invitation to talk about dying before it is too late.

Festival Synopsis

After being diagnosed with terminal cancer, science journalist Kurt Langbein becomes not just an observer but a subject. In *DYING FOR BEGINNERS*, he embarks on a journey that is both deeply personal and essayistic, exploring the boundary between life and death.

Between intensive care, palliative medicine, medical ethics, psycho-oncology, spiritual traditions, and accounts of near-death experiences, the film examines how our society deals with dying—and what happens when the finiteness of one's own life is no longer abstract.

Starting from his own illness and the death of a close friend, Langbein weaves together medical, philosophical, and existential perspectives. He speaks with doctors, researchers, end-of-life caregivers, and people who have come close to death. The result is a multifaceted, thoughtful, and moving panorama of fear, hope, autonomy, dignity, and the question of whether we can learn to let go.

DYING FOR BEGINNERS is a documentary essay about the last great taboo of our time—and at the same time a surprisingly life-affirming film about the art of living with the knowledge of death.

Theatrical Release Press Text

We all know that we will die. And yet we live as if this certainty did not concern us. We repress it, postpone it, and leave dying to hospitals, experts, and others. Only when illness, loss, or our own diagnosis breaks into our lives does an abstract truth become a personal question.

With *DYING FOR BEGINNERS*, the award-winning science journalist and documentary filmmaker Kurt Langbein addresses a subject that concerns us all—and yet is rarely discussed: dying. The film begins with his own cancer diagnosis and becomes a deeply personal search for orientation, knowledge, and support. The reporter becomes a patient; the investigation becomes an existential self-experiment.

Langbein visits intensive care units and palliative wards, speaking with doctors, philosophers, researchers, and end-of-life caregivers. He accompanies people confronting their approaching death and meets survivors of near-death experiences who recount moments of deepest fear as well as peace, light, and profound transformation.

The film unfolds a wide panorama between high-tech medicine, ethical dilemmas, personal grief, spiritual longing, and the hope for a self-determined end of life.

It does not seek to provide simple answers. *DYING FOR BEGINNERS* is neither a medical guide nor a spiritual manifesto. Rather, it is an open, thoughtful, and moving approach to life's ultimate question. What does dignity mean at the end of life? When does treatment become a burden? How do loved ones cope with letting go? And can confronting death change the way we live?

Because the film is told so personally, it achieves a universal resonance. Langbein shows that dying is not only a biological event but also a social, emotional, cultural, and philosophical process. He connects scientific insight with personal experience and turns a taboo into an invitation to conversation—serious, compassionate, and surprisingly relatable.

DYING FOR BEGINNERS is a film about finitude—but not a dark one. It tells of fear and pain, of loss of control and farewell. Above all, it tells of love, closeness, touch, comfort, and the possibility of facing the inevitable not only with fear, but also with awareness.

A documentary that changes the way we look at the end of life—and, in doing so, sharpens our view of life itself.

Alternative Loglines

Classic

After his cancer diagnosis, science journalist Kurt Langbein embarks on a personal

exploration of dying—and discovers, between intensive care, palliative support, and near-death experiences, that confronting death changes the way we see life.

Emotional

A cancer diagnosis, the death of a friend, and the reality of his own mortality force Kurt Langbein on a journey to life's final frontier—where fear, hope, and the question of a “good death” meet.

Festival-oriented

In a personal documentary essay, Kurt Langbein combines his own cancer experience with encounters from medicine, philosophy, and end-of-life care, asking how we want to die in a highly technologized world.