LEARNING BY CAMPING. The Patriarch's Watchful Eye
A documentary written and directed by Nicola Hochkeppel
2004, 62’

A 1960's and 70's West German vacation idyll. The Hubert J. Wagner family of Cologne – all nine
of then – trapped between the „simple life“ romanticism of camping and the educated middle-
class ideal of classics-based scholarship. Tax consultant Wagner, the arch-catholic clan patriarch,
suffers no amendments to his meticulous plans for the rigorous summer pilgrimages. Using the
family’s home-movie footage (1965 – 1975), the documentary film LEARNING BY CAMPING also
chronicles a chapter of German social history during the heyday of the flourishing welfare state.

Hitting the road for the holidays with
kids, kit, and campervan: The unique
super 8 aesthetic prompts
associations with highbrow Riviera
holidays, complete with madcap
comic appeal. Contrast is provided by
the present day interviews with
Hubert's wife Maria and her grown
children. At times critical, at times
with ironic humor, the family
members delve into early traumas.
Despite all attempts at leaving the
past behind, the story comes full
circle when the former younger
generation, now parents themselves,
proudly show us their own various and
sundry camping vehicles. There's a bit
of old man Wagner in all of them after
all.

Alexander von Schmidt

Directed and written by Nicola Hochkeppel
Cinematography: Hubert J. Wagner (†), Super8-Filme (1965-1975) Nicola
Hochkeppel
Editor: Oliver Szyza
Editing advice: Peter Eckes
Audio-Restoration/ Mastering: Daniel Schulte
Technical support: Sven Kesting/ Reinhard Möller

2005 The Image Festival, Toronto, Kanada
            Shadow Festival, Amsterdam, Netherlands

Biography
Nicola Hochkeppel, born 1972 in Cologne. M.A. in Media Studies currently working on her PhD (Film
on TV) at the Humboldt University (Berlin). Worked as a scholar on the project Die kleine und die große Show des DFGForschungsprojekts Programmgeschichte des DDR-Fernsehens –
komparativ (The Small and the Big Show of the DGF Research Project: a comparative program-
ing history of East German TV).

Filmography
2001 Cycles. 3’06 min, dv_color.
     Campileben. Theatersommer am Kap. 5’08 min, dv_color.