

“The Low-Phe Life” Summer Tour ’24: Filmmaker Builds Community Through In-Person Screenings of Animated Series with a Unique Perspective

Acclaimed documentary filmmaker Kurt Sensenbrenner launches a cross-country screening tour of his animated, documentary series “The Low-Phe Life” this summer. The series highlights anecdotes from community members with inherited metabolic conditions, shedding light on their daily lives and sharing humor in the unexpected turns.

There will be a community screening at 522 Carroll Ave, Ames, IA on August 27, 2024 at 5:30 PM. This free event features a back-to-back screening of Seasons 1 and 2 of the “Low-Phe Life”, a question-and-answer portion with Sensenbrenner, and an opportunity for viewers to connect with others in their community.

As an adult with both the rare metabolic condition Phenylketonuria (PKU) and type 1 diabetes, Sensenbrenner wanted to illustrate some of the challenges of these conditions using humor. He developed the concept for “The Low-Phe Life” series while isolating during the COVID pandemic. On a hiatus from travel and filming, he reflected on stories gathered from people he met at PKU conferences and events. Kurt wanted to convey the trials of life with a metabolic condition in a fun, family-friendly way. He pitched the project as an “animated memoir,” and secured a grant through flok (then PKU News) to develop and promote the series. The documentary gained solid traction through screenings at several film festivals, flok Family Camp, and various regional PKU events, with its popularity prompting a second season. Sensenbrenner shares, “It’s pretty surreal when you’ve made something for your own community, and an eight-year-old is quoting it back to you when you walk past them. It’s in those moments I realize its impact on a bunch of different generations.”

The premiere episode of Season 2 – titled “The Sub Shop” – recounts the story of a large group of PKU conference attendees who order identical veggie sandwiches from a shop, leaving the staff bewildered. Sensenbrenner explains, “It efficiently illustrates what PKU is, how all those people engaging in a similar transaction are connected, and also the sprawling aspect of how they interact with and educate the community around them.”

While the first season depicted life with PKU, Sensenbrenner expanded the scope of Season 2, including a vignette about life with Argininosuccinic Lyase Deficiency (ASA), a type of Urea Cycle Disorder. He envisions a third season that features a different condition in each episode. “The series has grown from PKU stories to the broader metabolic community, and I’m excited to keep learning and sharing stories about life with other conditions.”

Sensenbrenner’s summer tour not only promotes Season 2 of “The Low-Phe Life,” but unites people with metabolic conditions locally – fostering connections and support networks – an important part of the mission of flok Health, where Sensenbrenner is a board member. “The goal of the tour is community-building, so I want to eliminate as many roadblocks as possible to get the community involved,” he shares. This means hosting screenings in a variety of venues – from university campuses to museums to metabolic clinics to backyards. Sensenbrenner

welcomes spontaneity in the tour schedule and invites community members to inquire about impromptu screenings. Anyone interested in hosting an event can contact him at kurt@lowphelife.com

Kurt Sensenbrenner holds a Master of Fine Arts in Documentary Studies from Hofstra University and a Bachelor of Fine Arts from University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. His recent collaborations include work with peacock, More Perfect Union, Starts with Us, and the Patton Veterans Project. Sensenbrenner's documentaries have received recognition from PBS, National Geographic's Santiago Wild, Milwaukee Film, and others.