

“MAGGIE GROWLS”
BY BARBARA ATTIE AND JANET GOLDWATER

“Old age is an excellent time for outrage. My goal is to say or do at least one outrageous thing every week.” —Maggie Kuhn

“Well-aimed slingshots can topple giants.” —Maggie Kuhn

MAGGIE GROWLS is a portrait of the amazing, canny, lusty, charming and unstoppable Maggie Kuhn (1905-1995), who founded the Gray Panthers in 1970 after being forced to retire from a job she loved at the age of 65. Her outrage and determination fueled a political chain reaction that forever changed the lives of older Americans, repealing mandatory retirement laws and proving that “old” is not a dirty word. Out of what Ralph Nader called “the most significant retirement in modern American history,” Maggie created one of the most potent social movements of the century—one that was committed to justice, peace and fairness to all, regardless of age.

Maggie Kuhn was never afraid to march to her own beat and fight for what she believed in. Born in Buffalo in 1905, Maggie was a passionate social activist right from the start. She entered the workplace in 1926, with a job at the YWCA in Cleveland, organizing poor and working women. In 1950, she began a twenty-year stint in the Social Education and Action Office of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. It was a job she adored, one that kept her in the forefront of the social activist movement for decades. When she turned 65 and was forced to give up the career she loved, Maggie decided that she would not fade away quietly. Saying “don’t agonize, organize,” and reminding them that they had nothing to lose, she galvanized a group of friends and colleagues who had also been put prematurely out to pasture and launched the career for which she is renowned: as founder and leader of the Gray Panthers.

In an era replete with “movements,” the media quickly latched onto Maggie. Looking exactly like the stereotypical sweet little old lady, when Maggie spoke, people listened. With a disarming mixture of humor, shock value and common sense, Maggie deftly used her high visibility to combat media stereotypes that denigrated the elderly and went on to champion universal health care, nursing home reform, shared housing and consumer

protection. **MAGGIE GROWLS** looks at the forces that shaped the movement as well as its leader, using Maggie's life as a lens through which to examine the intertwined issues of social reform and aging in America.

We see Maggie's second career unfold in television appearances with Johnny Carson; on Capitol Hill, chiding senators and congressmen; and on the picket line, fighting injustice for all people, wherever she could. We also see her very human, womanly side as she speaks fondly of her many love affairs and close friendships. Maggie's insistence on talking publicly about sex, which often made her listeners squirm, leads to a serious re-thinking about what growing old was all about. As Maggie said, "sex and learning end only when rigor mortis sets in."

Interspersed are interviews with friends and colleagues including Ralph Nader and Studs Terkel and animated sequences by Paul and Sandra Fierlinger. As we learn in the film, Kuhn, who continued to play a role in the Gray Panthers until her death at age 89, is widely acknowledged as having started nothing less than a contemporary cultural revolution, both in terms of redefining the meaning of age and through her insistence on "young and old together." Her defiant "Panther growl" and dramatic slogan "Do something outrageous every day" set the tone for a documentary as memorable and inspiring as the woman herself.

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Credits

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| Producers/Directors | Barbara Attie and Janet Goldwater |
| Animators | Paul and Sandra Fierlinger |
| Editor | Kathleen Soulliere |
| Cinematographer | Peter Brownscombe |
| Music Composition and Sound Design | John Avarese |
| Associate producers | Patricia McLaughlin & Shannon Kane Meddock |

Featured Interviewees, in order of appearance:

Abe Bloom, Maryland Gray Panther
John Steinbach, Maryland Gray Panther
Louise Ramirez, Maryland Gray Panther
Ralph Nader, consumer advocate
Christina Long, biographer

Studs Terkel, oral historian
Gretchen Killinger, Maggie's cousin
Clarice Herbert, Germantown YMCA, Philadelphia
Thelma Adair, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Karen Hessel, National Council of Churches
Fernando Torres-Gil, Gerontologist, UCLA
Edith Giese, former Gray Panthers Executive Director
Steve McConnell, Alzheimer's Association
George Gerbner, Annenberg School of Communications
Harun Fox, member of the Gray Panthers chapter at the State Correctional Institute in Graterford
Louis Thomas, member of the Gray Panthers chapter at the State Correctional Institute in Graterford
Sue Leary, Maggie's personal assistant

About the Filmmakers

Barbara Attie and Janet Goldwater (Producers / Directors)

Philadelphia filmmakers Barbara Attie and Janet Goldwater have collaborated on documentaries focusing on women's lives for over a decade. Their most recent award-winning collaborations, *Landowska: Uncommon Visionary* (1997) and *I Witness: Shot Down in Pensacola* (2000), have been widely screened and publicly praised. In 1999, Attie, with Martha Lubell, produced and directed *Daring to Resist: Three Women Face the Holocaust*. Other documentaries produced by Attie and Goldwater include *Motherless: A Legacy of Loss from Illegal Abortion; Legal But Out of Reach: Six Women's Abortion Stories*; and *If It's Not a Piano, What is It?*



Paul and Sandra Fierlinger (Animators)

Paul Fierlinger was Czechoslovakia's first independent producer of animated films, before coming to the U.S. in 1968. In 1971, Fierlinger and his wife Sandra formed the animation house AR&T Associates, which has produced over 700 films. Their animation has received over 100 awards, including an Academy Award nomination for *It's So Nice to Have a Wolf Around the House*. In 2000, the Fierlingers completed *Drawn From Life*, a series of two-minute films for Oxygen. In 2001, their ITVS-funded *Still Life with Animated Dogs* was broadcast nationally on PBS.