



“Sally!” celebrates the life and work of one of second-wave feminism’s most beloved icons—a brilliant and sexy superstar who spearheaded some of the greatest struggles for women’s and gay rights and inspired thousands. **So, how come you’ve never heard of Sally Gearhart?**

SALLY!

WHO WAS SALLY GEARHART?

(1931 – 2021)

Virginia:

Sally was born on April 15, 1931, and grew up with her grandmother in the small Southern town of Pearisburg, Virginia. She attended Sweet Briar College for women, studying theatre and English. Although she met her first woman lover in college, Sally was a committed Christian and staunch conservative.

Texas:

After getting a Master’s and Ph.D. in theatre and public address, Sally moved to Texas, where she was a wildly popular teacher for many years. Yet she hid deep in the closet and faced threats of blackmail.

San Francisco:

Sally moved to San Francisco in the 1970s, giving up her tenured position to escape the constraints of Texas, conservatism, Christianity, and the closet. She exploded onto the gay scene, helping co-found one of the first-ever Women Studies departments at San Francisco State University, becoming the first out lesbian to gain tenure, and fighting the anti-gay Briggs Initiative shoulder-to-shoulder with Harvey Milk. Sally appeared in the groundbreaking film “Word Is Out” (1977) and wrote the lesbian fantasy novel “The Wanderground” (1978), which envisioned a female utopia.

Willits:

In 1975, Sally co-created a women’s land community in the woods of Northern California, near the small town of Willits. This separatist community was initially a weekend and summer refuge, but Sally moved here full-time when she retired in 1991. “The land” thrived for decades, but eventually, women aged or moved on. Fortunately, an eclectic set of neighbors helped Sally conclude her long life on her terms.

Discussion Questions

“Sally!” preserves many memories of people who loved and worked alongside her. After watching the documentary, reflect upon and celebrate her life using these quotes and questions.

“She just had it, and we all fell in love with her.”

— Roma Guy, Activist, Friend of Sally’s

- After watching “Sally!” What do you describe as the “it?”
- What do you feel is Sally’s contemporary relevance as an activist, a teacher, and a thinker?

“The film about Harvey Milk that included what happened during the No on 6 campaign came out, and Sally was nowhere to be seen. She deserves so much credit, and for her to get none at all. It’s a crime.”

— Gwenn Craig, Activist, Manager No On Prop 6 Campaign

- What role do you think films and television shows play in remembering history?
- Why do you think certain individuals and groups are often left out? What impact does that have?

“Even though Christianity tried to teach her to hate her lesbianism, her lesbianism did not teach her to hate her spirituality.”

— Reverend Jim Mitulski, Minister, Activist

- How did Sally manage the contradictions between her lesbianism and her Christianity?

“Feminism has done more to save the lives of women in the last 20 years than Jesus Christ did in 2000 years of Christianity.”

— Sally Gearhart

- How have you and/or how has your generation benefitted from feminism?
- What can women do today that was impossible for Sally’s generation of women?



Take Action: Learn from Sally

CORRECT THE OMISSION OF WOMEN IN QUEER/ LGBTQ HISTORY

"Lesbians are invisible ..., first of all, because they're women, and women are more invisible than men because women do not have the power in this society that men do."

— Sally Gearhart

- What strategies do you believe can achieve a more inclusive and representative queer and LGBTQ historical record?

TEACH AND TELL FEMINIST HISTORY

"Being able to tell our story was beyond anything I knew because I had been silenced. And I think a lot of times, especially during that time, women felt isolated. And so, it took us out of that isolation and into a larger community of women who were struggling with the same issues."

— Robin Song, Student of Sally's

- Are women and queer people still sometimes isolated, how is that potentially harmful, and what are some ways to take them out of that isolation?
- So many women who benefit from feminism (voting rights, the right to work, reproductive rights, and more) still say they reject it.
 - Why is that, and how can we engage both women and men in productive conversations about the benefits of women's equality and empowerment?

INSPIRE ACTIVISM

"Sally Gearhart, at a particular moment in our history, when it really mattered, stepped up and inspired tens of thousands of people and articulated the dreams of millions. She's an extraordinary woman."

— Cleve Jones, Author, Activist

- How did Sally inspire activism in others?
- What did you learn from the film that helped inspire you to work for change?
- In what arenas and for what groups of people do we still need to move forward and make progress? Describe any similarities and differences between the battles we're fighting today and those that Sally and her colleagues fought.

REACH ACROSS POLITICAL DIVIDES

"She wanted all of us to see the spirit in one another. She wanted all of us to see the possibilities in one another, the possibilities that we could be our better selves. And to do that, you have to reach across the aisle. You have to communicate, and ultimately, you have to love one another. You even gotta love your enemies."

— Dorothy Haecker, Colleague and Friend of Sally's

- Why is it important to "reach across the aisle"?
- What do you think is missing in today's political climate that Sally embodied?
- In today's hyper-divisive political climate, what type of activism allows us to stand up for our rights and yet love our enemies?

Learn More:

Visit www.sallygearhartfilm.com for information on screenings in colleges, universities, and community groups. Sign up to stay in touch and be informed about our impact campaign.