

Interview: Filmmaker Julia Reichert to Appear at Midwest Independent Film Festival on Aug. 7, 2012

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on August 6, 2012 - 8:19pm

- [A Lion in the House](#) [2]
- [Growing Up Female](#) [3]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [4]
- [Interview](#) [5]
- [Julia Reichert](#) [6]
- [Midwest Independent Film Festival](#) [7]
- [Oscar](#) [8]
- [Oscars](#) [9]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [10]
- [Seeing Red](#) [11]
- [The Last Truck: Closing of a GM Plant](#) [12]
- [Union Maids](#) [13]

CHICAGO – Julia Reichert is a filmmaker of legendary proportions. Her career has spanned from the radical 1960s to the present, and along the way she has made passionate documentaries about life affirming and life evolving events, earning three Oscar nominations. She will make an appearance at Female Filmmakers Night at the Midwest Independent Film Festival on August 7th.

Julia Reichert attended college during the latter part of the 1960s, and came of age as the social climate in America was changing every year. This influenced her approach to filmmaking, culminating in her first documentary “Growing Up Female” (1971). This film is recognized as one of the first feminist perspectives within the center of the woman’s movement revolution of the era, and in 2011 was designated for preservation by the National Film Registry. Among other films, she went on to produce and direct three more Oscar nominated documentaries, “Union Maids” (1976), “Seeing Red” (1984) and “The Last Truck: Closing of a GM Plant” (2009), which will screen at the Midwest Independent Film Festival as part of the Female Filmmakers Night.



Filmmakers Steve Bognar and Julia Reichert with the Employee Subjects of ‘The Last Truck: Closing of a GM Plant’
Photo credit: Wright State University

Reichert is currently a professor of Motion Pictures at Wright State University in Southwest Ohio, and it was the closing of the General Motors Plant in nearby Moraine that inspired “The Last Truck.” HollywoodChicago.com spoke to Professor Reichert in anticipation of her appearance in Chicago.

HollywoodChicago.com: You are participating in Female Filmmakers Night at the Midwest Independent Film Festival. In your opinion, how does the female voice, both classic and modern, make a difference in the rough-and-tumble world of making movies?

Julia Reichert: When women began to pick up the camera in numbers, which would be around the late 1960s and early ‘70s, we began to see women’s stories on the screen, whether documentary or feature. The woman as a protagonist is a very recent phenomenon, different

from the usual two roles of mother or prostitute. And all these images, when I was growing up, were controlled by men. So for one thing, you've got a whole lot more stories by women, produced by women.

I've noticed also that women have influenced the work process in film. The idea of making more collaboratively, where people on the set are listened to more, was emphasized in the early days of women making films. It was something that we wanted to try.

HollywoodChicago.com: Given that your film 'The Last Truck: Closing of a GM Plant' is told without narration, and mostly through the point-of-view of the workers, at what point during the process of shooting and editing the documentary was the moment when you and fellow producer Steven Bognar knew how you were going to piece the story together?

Reichert: We always approached it hoping we wouldn't need narration, and during the editing process we saw that it could happen. There are title cards that give facts, so we thought that was important. Also there are a handful of main characters, because the autoworkers had such pride that we really needed multiple voices. So we have multiple characters and multiple stories in the whole film that I hope gives you an experience with these folks in the last six months of a General Motors plant, and the last six months of their lives as people who thought they had job security.

HollywoodChicago.com: You spoke in another interview about Moraine, Ohio being in your 'community.' In looking back, what struck you about the personality of a community that depends on one type of manufacturing to define their existence, the so-called company town?

Reichert: People who work in Moraine come from a thirty mile radius, so it isn't exactly like everybody lives near the factory. The town of Moraine itself did benefit from the tax base that came from General Motors. For a small community outside of Dayton, it has its own city hall, a beautiful water park, fairgrounds, fireworks, all because of the GM presence. The summer after the plant closed, the water park was shut down, there wasn't a fair and the city had to lay off workers. There is still a town there, but it is much diminished.

HollywoodChicago.com: Your first film was "Growing Up Female" in 1971, which was recently added to the National Film Registry preservation list...

Reichert: Yes, isn't that awesome? It was my student film from Antioch College.

HollywoodChicago.com: What were the events of that era that inspired you to make the film and has the hope you felt behind the making up of it flowered into a better world for women in general right now?



Still from Julia Reichert's 'Growing Up Female' (1971)
Photo credit: Wright State University

Reichert: The events for me were the early buds of the women's liberation movement. I was at Antioch College, and luckily I was in an early woman's consciousness raising group. Five of us met every week for months, and we knew there was a larger movement, but we weren't connected to it. But it was the insight of that group in how we were similar – our views of sexuality, our bodies, our mothers, relative intellect – we'd take one topic for a week and just talk about it. We asked questions about our first periods, issues of rape and our attitudes toward men. All these ideas went into the film.

As far as what has changed, I will make a bold statement. The women's movement has made the biggest change in society of all the movements in America. Our changes started in the bedroom and kitchen, and ended up in the legislature. It started with our daily lives, and it became Title IX, procedures in the law having to do with rape and terms like 'sexual harassment' and the 'glass ceiling,' which were never in consideration before. We have women in Congress, women professors, women in law school in tremendous numbers and more women doctors. These are improvements.

HollywoodChicago.com: What is your opinion of how your generation has approached this phase of their lives? Has the promise of the 1960's and the youth that led so much change continued as a theme in the United States, or has the proliferation of commerce and technology altered that attitude?

Reichert: We felt like we could alter the outcome of the Vietnam War by getting onto the streets, which became chaotic, and I think that is why the war ended, so by that power we influenced policy. I don't think my generation is over the historic horizon yet, when I go to political events I see a lot of people with gray hair. I think my generation was trained that we need to be civically involved and engaged in our time. We were and we never stopped, most of us. I don't feel like the younger generation is uncaring, unconcerned or unengaged. I just think it's very tough road for them, much more rough that it was for us.

HollywoodChicago.com: Finally, who do you think are the most important female filmmakers in cinema history, and how do they inspire you to this day?

Reichert: I will give you three people. Alice Guy-Blaché was a French filmmaker who was active in the early 1900s, and helped established narrative form. She taught American filmmakers, and was an early special effects expert. She didn't really affect me as much as I was just glad she was there. She made 900 films, many of them before the industry developed.

As far as modern filmmakers, Jane Campion is my heroine. 'The Piano' to me is the great achievement in women's filmmaking. She is a visionary, a pioneer and I've loved what she has done. And then there is Kathryn Bigelow. I happened to be at the Oscars when she won for 'The Hurt Locker.' I didn't expect to get emotional, but I just started crying. I just didn't expect to have that reaction, but it took so long for that to happen. For all that has meant in my life, in striving to make things better for women and for all the women who never made it, that all welled up in me when Kathryn Bigelow won that Oscar.

Tickets are still available for the Midwest Independent Film Festival presents Female Filmmakers Night at the Landmark Century Centre (2828 N. Clark), in Chicago on Tuesday, August 7th, beginning at 6pm. [Click here](#) [14] for more information and to purchase tickets.



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- [1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/hankq>
- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/a-lion-in-the-house>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/growing-up-female>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hollywoodchicagodotcom-content>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/interview.html>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/julia-reichert>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/midwest-independent-film-festival>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/oscar-0>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/oscar>
- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/patrick-mcdonald>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/seeing-red>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/the-last-truck-closing-of-a-gm-plant>
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